"EL BAILE DEL PUEBLO":

A 60-YEAR LEGACY OF PERFORMING A HISTORY OF CUBANS OF AFRICAN DECENT THROUGH CASINO SALSA

A Thesis

By

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ABSTRACT

Cubanos con Decendencia Africana, or Cubans of African descent (CDA) in Havana have endured generations of being overlooked by the dominant historical discourse of the country that characterized them as second-class citizens. Embodied performance provided the avenues of artistic liberation that combatted the dominant narratives created since the arrival of enslaved Africans on the island. The subversive acts of defiance within performance helped the Black community maintain a religious belief system, preserve a pride in an African heritage, and create a subcultural identity. One of the most notable social dance genres of the time period was Casino Salsa. Its emerged as an oppressive tool of the elite classes during pre-revolutionary Cuba, and became an instrument of empowerment for the marginalized *pueblo* in revolutionary Cuba. The trajectory of Casino Salsa from pre-revolutionary to contemporary Cuba traces the history, voice, and goals of the CDA community who performed it.

Casino Salsa is a dance genre that originated in Cuba during the 1950s. It reflected the rigid racial segregation of pre-revolutionary Cuba, which justified the exclusion of CDA from entering social spaces that practiced the genre. However, after the first wave of *Cubanos Blancos* (white Cubans) migration to the United States, it could not survive unless CDA had direct access to the genre. After 1959, Casino Salsa choreography visibly shifted. It incorporated movement from the Yoruba tradition that enacted a racialized and religious identity in social dance spaces. It empowered the Black community during a time when religions were considered as fostering counterrevolutionary ideologies. CDA embedded choreographic markers that

represented their complex identities within secular spaces. After the Special Period of the 1990s, the struggles of the Black community were incredibly apparent. They were unable to participate in the tourist economy because of popular discriminatory practices that reinforced pre-revolutionary attitudes towards a racialized Other in the work force. During this time, young artists of African descent looked to global sounds that reflected their struggle and marginalization like hip hop and reggaeton. They incorporated the influences of these genres' lyrics, music, and choreography into Casino Salsa.

Casino has only been studied through means of instruction, and there is currently no scholarship presenting the accolades of Casino Salsa as a mode of racial expression. This investigation seeks to answer the question: how have CDA been able celebrate their complex racial and religious identities through the performance of Casino since pre-revolutionary Cuba? Through a new historicist approach I investigate power and racial dynamics in three phases of Cuban history: pre-revolutionary, post revolutionary, and contemporary. I also rely on my ethnographic field notes and interviews to explore my claims. I interrogate the complexities of these various time periods through the discourses of critical race theory, African diaspora dance, globalization, subculture, and religious studies. CDA have maintained a strong connection to their African roots by meticulously incorporating their identities within the nationalist tools of the state. This lens in Cuban performance explores a unique historical perspective that validates the efforts made by CDA in the creation and sustainability of the island's last national sponsored social dance, Casino Salsa.

DEDICATION

This master's thesis is dedicated to the *Cubanos con descendencia Africana* whose artistic achievements have been omitted from Cuba's dominant historical discourse for far too long. May your voices inspire those who do not know your truth.

Este tesis esta dedicado la las comunidades de Cubanos de descendencia Africana quienes logros artísticos fueron omitidos del discurso histórico dominante en Cuba por tanto tiempo. Que sus voces inspiren a las poblaciones que no todavía reconocen su verdad.

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Thank you to my loving and encouraging family. To my mother, who worked herself to bone to see me get to this point in my academic career, I send my sincerest gratitude. Her name perfectly captures her essence, Ludivina, is the divine light of my life. She has supported me throughout this entire process, and taught to me to advocate for what I belief in. I hope I have done just that. *Espero que iminé parte de la luz que herrede de ti en mi trabajo*. I thank my brother, Steven, for being my inspiration and muse. He is my motivation to succeed. I would also like to thank my father for his sacrifices in getting me to this point. I want to thank my family for encouraging me with words and keeping me in their prayers. I could not have gotten to this point, if I had lost the sense of who I was along the way. Thank you for keeping me grounded, and for instilling the *guerrillera* within me to not falter during times of tribulations.

I express my greatest appreciation to the community members of Pogoloti, Miramar, and Centro Havana who entrusted me with their words and experiences. I thank them for their hospitality, their love, and their incredibly powerful voices that still resonate with me. More importantly, I am grateful for the opportunity to get to know them and call them friends and family.

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INTRODUCTION

As a Mexican-American dancer, my initial entry to Cuba in 2013 exposed me to a vastly different dance culture and genre called Casino Salsa. I had danced in a multitude of Salsa clubs before, but to my surprise the style and structure of the dances that emerged from the La Casa de La Musica Discotheque were vastly different than the Salsa dance styles I was used to. LA style Salsa and Newyorican Mambo are performed on the 1 count of the music, and Casino on the 2 count[1]. This major difference seemed simple enough for me to hear in the music, but not feel in my own body. It seemed counter intuitive. As I walked into Casa de La Musica in Havana for the first time, the overwhelming sense of inadequacy consumed me.

The dance hall featured a live band on an elevated stage, and exposed a dance floor flooded with talented performers who performed Casino Salsa in any of its performative forms (See Appendix 3). I became introverted, intimidated, and afraid to dance. In many ways, this setting was fraught with complex performance relationships and choreographic vocabularies that I knew I did not understand. After realizing that my insecurities would only further prolong my anxiety, I decided to dance with the only person that seemed to dance in the ways that I was accustomed to. I danced with an elderly small statured man in the center of the dance floor. We danced a song with syncopated rhythms and choreography, and more importantly danced on the one. Once

[1] According to Cindy Garcia, "The *contratiempo* of Cuban son and casino takes its cues from the rhythm of the clave, although danced interpretations can correlate rhythmically with "on the two" (48). It emphasized a different count than LA Style Salsa and Newyorican Mambo, which many performance institution in the US do not officially teach.

the music transitioned to a slower song, I asked him where he was from. He responded with a smile and uttered "Paris." I felt confortable dancing with him because of the similar style we shared; however we were not dancing the music in typical *contratiempo* form in Casino Salsa.

As I moved to the perimeter of the dance floor, I attempted to break down the complex footwork that I had a difficult time executing. My thinking was interrupted as Lionel asked me for a dance. He a young and tall Cuban man, made me even more reticent to say yes. I was so nervous about embarrassing myself. We danced to a song by Isaac Delgado, considered one of the fathers of Cuban Salsa[2], and I started to nervously laugh at my inability to match his fluid footwork. He was giving me names of *figuras* [3]he wanted me to follow, but I did not have sufficient knowledge on what "71", "sientala", "pa'ti pa'mi", or "dile que no" meant. I had never been exposed to the Casino principles of social dancing, and it was quite clear to Lionel. After a song, he began laughing at me as if to acknowledge my willingness to dance, but my inability to meet the expectation. He said, "Mamita, estoy cansado pero a la proxima te tengo [I'm a bit tired, but I gotchu on the next one]," and he let my hand go as he directed me to the rim of the dance floor. I knew he was being nice, and would most definitely not return for a second dance.

I had been *botada* ("dumped") , because of my inability to follow his lead. After the initial feeling of rejection, I sat with Eddie, our group translator, who was kind

[2] Casino Salsa refers to the Cuban choreographic dance genre, and Cuban Salsa refers to the musical genre that is paired with.
[3] *Figuras* are choreographic dance combinations that people learn, name, and execute on the dance floor.

enough to help me process what had just happened. With a grin on his face, he leaned in to begin the conversation.

"Mira Mayrita, it's okay to not have it. Hell, tourists never figure it out and I think you can," he encouraged me.

"I just don't know why I had such a difficult time following him," I replied.

"Ño! You have it all wrong. Dancing Casino is dancing the African beats and confidence. It's in the people. Our birthright. You can learn the steps easy [sic], but how are you gonna [sic] understand us better to dance it better?" he asked me.

I had willingly accepted the task of learning more, in the hope of dancing it better. I didn't want to leave Cuba without improving even slightly on the dance genre that humbled me tremendously upon arriving. I enrolled into two dance courses through the Centro International de Arte (CIArte): *Bailes Populares* and Contemporary, in order to attempt to partially answer the question how does Africa manifest itself in Casino Salsa and the dancers who perform it? Eddie, sparked my initial interest in my investigation of the connection between Africa and Casino Salsa.

This arduous question made me very nervous about how I would attempt to tackle such a complicated topic. I wanted to understand the complexities of Africa, which included but were not limited to race, class, gender, religion, culture, and location. I hesitated at my original inclination to conduct this study because I knew that I constantly walked the line between a cultural insider and outsider, researcher and friend, dancer and scholar, and *Yuma* (foreigner)[4] and Latina. My liminal position made it

[4] Yuma is a term used to describe foreigners, developed countries, and bourgeois behavior in

necessary and therefore comfortable for me to ask questions about what I did not know, to sit in silence to better understand the information I was given, and to annotate the stories that people comfortably shared with me. I began to construct a new project around my interactions with friends, family members, and performing artists. I tried to stray away from any pre-conceived notions I had of Cuba, and let my informants drive the work I would write. This project is largely a result of my interactions in Cuba with the 13 people I had the privilege to interview, my professors[5], my host family, and the community of Pogoloti, Marianao (See Appendix, 1).[6]

Cuban society. Although the term originated from the Elmore Leonard short story "three-ten to Yuma" in 1957, which details the relationship between a sheriff and outlaw who overcome tremendous odds to get the criminal into the train by the 3:10 departure time to Yuma, Arizona. No one in Cuba truly knows why the term Yuma resonated so much with the people, but alas it is used quite frequently. It originally signified the United States and the American tourists, however now it is a term that embodies all foreigners into Cuba and those who have moved to Cuba and adapted to their luxurious lifestyles abroad (Ryer, 199-206). The term can be used to address a person as "Yuma," a country as "La Yuma," or the action of becoming high class in the global arena as "*se piensa Yuma* [they think of themselves as Yuma]" (Yisel, 2015). Ryer also speaks to the colloquial language surrounding *Yuma* actions with phrases like *"Asere,que cosa mas Yuma!*" [What a most yuma thing, buddy!] (Ryer, 206). These varied categories of *Yuma* allude to a complex relationship between Cubans and foreigners.

[5] I began taking classes with Edicta Sherwood and Robin Rodriguez Sherwood in Cuban Folklore and *Bailes Populares*. Cuban Folklore focused on the instruction of Yoruba orisha choreography, and *Bailes Populares* (popular dance genres) taught me social Cuban dance genres like Casino, Mambo, Cha Cha Cha, and Son.

[6] Pogoloti is one of Havana's first predominantly Black municipalities.

Figure 1: Pogoloti Community Aerial View. Photo provided by author (2015).

Pogoloti, Marianao is considered to be a *zona caliente* ("hot zone"), in Havana. It gets its reputation from pre-revolutionary stereotypes of danger, urbanity, and poverty. These characteristics coincide with its status as one of the first majority Black municipalities in Havana. The racial demographics have not changed much in this community, and so Pogoloti has a vibrant Afro-Atlantic religious community of Abakua, Yoruba, and Palomonte practitioners.[7] I lived right next door to a *finca* ("barn"), which held animals used predominantly for ceremonial blood sacrifice in most of these Afro-Atlantic faiths. In addition to this, I lived three streets away from *La Isla Del Polvo* (The Isle of Dust). It was the name of a subcommunity within Pogoloti that earned its name from the cloud of dust that arose during frequent outdoor ritual dance performances.

[7] Although Yoruba is one of the most popular Afro-Atlantic religions in Cuba. Abakua is an Egbo religious tradition characterized as a faith fraternity. It focuses on masculinity and brotherhood. Palo is a Congo based religious tradition.

Living as a guest in this predominantly Black community gave me the incredible opportunity of seeing how faith played a pivotal part in Cuban daily life and identity. I want my work to address and validate the Afro-Religious community's presence in a history that largely marginalized them. As a Pentecostal Christian, I grew up in a faith that was seemingly contradictory to the faiths that I was newly exposed to in Cuba. However, I became fascinated by the ways in which both faiths viewed the body as the site of divine intervention with spirit and the divine world. Growing up within a Pentecostal belief system, I understood my body to be a vessel that the Holy Spirit uses to help me communicate with God. This idea parallels the common Afro-Atlantic religious belief that the human body connects to the divine world through spiritual possession. Spirit's presence in both religious ideologies highlights an important corporeal aspect of experiencing God within the body that resonated with me. It was endearing to know that God resides within the body of followers as a way to help them persevere through the harsh conditions and tribulations of life on Earth. Although I do not consider myself to be an Afro-Atlantic religious practitioner, I gained valuable insight and a respect for how spirit and spirituality plays a vital role in the survival of the community *of Cubanos con descendencia Africana* (CDA), or Cubans of African descent.

For this reason, I will not use the term Afro-Cuban in my research. It is an alien term in this community, which self identifies as Cuban *comunidades negras,* Black communities. Therefore, in this thesis, I will respect the use of this term in my research. It is partly my discomfort with the word Afro-Cuban that made me begin to think about

an alternative term that could account for the complexities Cuban identity in a way that was acceptable, accessible, and comprehensive in the field.

I use the broad term *Cubanos con decendencia Africana* (CDA) to encompass complexities of people's cultural identities that are directly connected to an African heritage, consciousness, and/or Black racial identity[8]. Cuban society does not operate by the American dominant discourse of the "1 drop rule", which classifies Blackness in the United States. On the contrary, Cubans exhibit a complex understanding of the intersectionalities of identity, which I call an acknowledgement of sociopolitical multi-identifications of Cubanness. It accounts for the intersectionalities of racial, ethnic, and conscious identities, to varied degrees, within CDA individuals that view Africa as the empowering site of their roots. Through this model, Africanness is a state of mind and a way of being, and should not be reduced to skin complexion.

[8] I use this term as a descriptor and not as an official title of an ethnic group, in my effort to not impose a Western construct of race onto group.

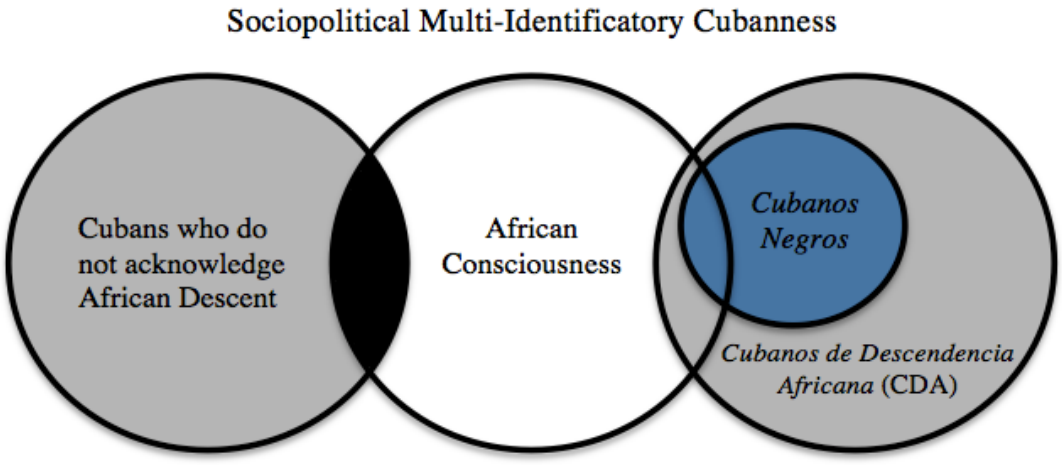

Figure 2: Sociopolitical Multi-Identificatory Cubanness. A general outline of the perspectives of varied identities that I encountered while in Cuba, both in 2013 and 2015. The key outlines the meaning of the shaded areas, which reflect the interviews and conversations I had with Cubans in the field.

Racial Blackness or markers of Blackness demonstrate the most overt and visible connection to Africanness. People who have darker skin complexions are perceived as *Cubanos Negros,* or Black Cubans. Although racial Blackness relies heavily on visible cues, it can also be perceived through speech patterns and visual/phenotypical cues of Blackness especially skin tone, facial features and body type. Basically, racialized black phenotypes such as "pelo negro [black hair]," or "Nariz negra [black nose]"—which also

define North American connotations of blackness—plague daily conversations in Cuba. Whereas in the United States, racial and ethnic identities are socially perceived as synonyms for African Americans, in Cuba an African heritage seems to be the less significant of the two.

African heritage links CDA directly to Yoruba, Congo, Carabali, or Bantu ethnic groups. CDA seem to understand their racial and ethnic mixedness, which can be seen in many colloquial phrases that express this very sentiment. For example, "Aquí, el que no tiene del Congo, tiene de Carabalí [here, whoever doesn't have of the Congo, has of the Carabali]" or "el negro tras de la oreja [black behind the ear]." These daily reminders of mixedness in Cuba signified a shared Cuban identity. However, these phrases glossed over the spectrum of the multitude of ways that people identified an African heritage, whether through these colloquial phrases, through a critical understanding of Africa, and every shade in between. While all Cubans were considered to be connected to an African heritage, to a certain extent, not all appear to carry the dominant visible traits that outwardly indicate Africanness and its social consequences.

An African consciousness manifests itself in an active enactment and acknowledgement of an African heritage, an Afro-Atlantic religious belief system, culture, or self-identification. It acts as a counter frame to the notions of Africa as inferior, savage, and primitive (Feagin, 54). Africanness in Cuba is thus much more a state of being than a hereditary claim to an unknown past. It is the understanding of ones own roots. People were reclaiming a history that the Europeans attempted to erase, and

became agents of their own history telling through the understanding of African consciousness

In Cuba, expressions of racial Blackness and African conscious identities are the most powerful. The racial idea of Blackness is powerful because it speaks to a shared marginalization in daily life and society. It alludes to a community within a struggle defined by appearance. African consciousness acts as a clear reclamation of a Black racial identity and pride in African lineage that Cubans have chosen to enact upon. In my experiences, Santeros, practitioners of the Yoruba based faith Santeria, in Havana used positive affirmations of the world *Negro,* even if they were directing this phrase to someone with pale skin or blonde hair. Additionally, an African consciousness transcended appearance, and alluded to the enactment of an ideological and spiritual connection to Africa. This sentiment towards Blackness shows how Afro-Atlantic religions could foster and create the catalyst for an African consciousness in the diapora. Africa acts as a source of a power that opens the key to a deeper knowledge of the self.

In this thesis, I aim to specifically insert the voices of CDA into the narrative of popular Cuban performance. I aim to do so by focusing on developments in social dance, particularly Casino Salsa, in their historical contexts. Casino Salsa is dance genre that emerged during the political tensions of the 1950s. It began as a choreographic culmination of the Cuban-European hybrid dance styles son, danzon, mambo, and cha cha cha. Although Casino Salsa did not earn its current name until 1956, its antecedents and influences marked it as a source of a unique Cuban pride. During the 1950s it was

racialized as an exclusively white practice. It has, since then, become a dance representative of the voices and aesthetic tastes of the *pueblo*.

During my fieldwork in Cuba, I constantly heard people state that Casino was "el baile del pueblo [the dance of the people]" because "nosotros decidimos que poner y que sacar [we decide what goes into it and what gets taken out] of the repertoire" (Edicta, 2015). Everyone on the island who continues to practice the dance form felt they had ownership over the dance genre they helped create and maintain for nearly 60 years. The Cuban *pueblo* is a reference to the people and as described by John Storey, "it takes issue with any approach that suggests that it is something imposed … from above' but, rather, addresses "an 'authentic' culture of 'the people'. This is popular culture as folk culture: a culture of the people for the people" (Storey, 9). *Pueblo* "is often a highly romanticized concept of working-class culture construed as the major source of symbolic protest within contemporary capitalism'" (Bennett, 27). The *pueblo* arises as counterculture within the capitalist society: a people joined in solidarity for equity. From the perspective of a Marxist economic framework, *el pueblo* is the community of disenfranchised working class people who do not own or control the means of production: the proletariat that seeks to gain power and authority over the means of production. Casino originated as the dance of a hegemonic elite, but became something with which *pueblo* on the margins of Cuban culture identified: It grew to embody the political voice of "the people" in social dance spaces as its choreography embodied the aspirations of the disenfranchised.

I explore the trajectory of the CDA's presence in Casino Salsa that has embodied in the development of this social dance through the three main stages of Cuban history - pre-revolution, post-revolutionary, and contemporary. The emphasis on Africanness and what accounts for Africanness changes during the course of these three time periods. However, even as markers that indicated Africanness in Cuba shifted over time, they were predominantly the perspectives of the racially marginalized. CDA, specifically *Cubanos Negros*, Black Cubans, equated with a common social struggle within these designated time periods. I show how *Cubanos Negros* have in many ways been omitted from the narratives about Cuban cultural production, after the revolution in line with the latter's egalitarian socio-political rhetoric. However, in leaving their influence on the Casino Salsa genre unaccredited, the state reiterates generations of devaluing reducing the achievements of CDA. *Cubanos Negros* have contributed to an art form—Casino Salsa— that has become a signature of Cuban *musica bailable* or social dance performance, since the 1950s. Indeed, the dance continues to be a mode by which the Black Cuban community has represented its experiences. I argue that the purposeful omission or inclusion of the Black Cuban perspective within the choreography of Casino Salsa is incredibly telling of Cuban political and economic relations of its time. My thesis is an ethnographic historical truth telling of the pre-revolutionary, post-revolutionary, and contemporary CDA experience through the lens of Casino Salsa performance.

In Chapter 1, I describe the three main historical contexts— pre revolutionary, post revolutionary, and contemporary Cuba— in which I later trace the development of

Casino Salsa in relation to the Black Cuban experience. In my description I address the political, economic (especially US-Cuba political and economic), and social dynamics of these historical contexts. I track Cuba and Cuba-US political and economic ties overtime.

Chapter 2 examines the Casino Salsa scene in pre-revolutionary Cuba. I show how postcards, pamphlets, and posters were used as marketing tools to entice American tourists to come to Cuba. Because these touristic advertising images promoted a single narrative of Cuba as an exotic and hypersexualized island, they marginalized and masked the contributions of CDA to performance all together. In many ways, tourist advertising consolidates the impression in entertainment sites such as Casinos that Black people's places was in menial service roles, behind the scenes and away from the forefront of performances, typically seen in Casinos. In the chapter, I also look at how wealthy *Cubanos Blancos* (white Cubans) and Americans' economic relationship created an idealization of American consumerism that one finds evident in Casino Salsa *figuras* characteristic of the time period. My point is that Casino Salsa was an exclusively white performance during this time, and as such, it excluded black participation and or purposefully silenced and erased the Black experience and contribution to the development and popularization of the dance.

Chapter 3, describes the effects, on Casino Salsa performance, of the political shift in Cuba after the triumph of the revolution and the first wave of Cuban migration to the United States. In contrast to the exclusion and marginalization during the pre-revolutionary year, revolution-era performances of Casino Salsa asserted an African

consciousness by incorporating of Yoruba-influenced movement vocabularies and a polyrhythmic sound with an emphasis on percussion[9]. CDA went from being excluded from the casino spaces that featured performances of Casino Salsa, to becoming the new gatekeepers of the genre. The island became more inclusive and representative of the racial demographics within its borders. It was therefore after the triumph of the revolution that CDA found the social and political space to embody their celebration and express their grievances and concerns about their place in this new socio-political order.

Chapter 4, focuses on the contemporary performances of Casino Salsa. These performances have given voice to the concerns of a new generation of CDA born after the Special Period[10]. The young CDA became incredibly vocal and plays a powerful role in the choreographic shifts that occurred in the practice of Casino Salsa after the 1990s. They voiced their social and economic concerns through the lyrical, musical, and choreographic influences they had on Casino Salsa by incorporating hip hop, timba, and reggaetón music and dance elements to the Casino Salsa repertoire.

[9] The emphasis on percussion and the presence of rumba choreographies amount to the assertion of a Black consciousness, because CDA performed parts of their complex racial identities through the polyrhythmic sounds that are characteristic of African diasporic music. It is also important to note that in Yoruba religions, the drums carry spiritual power. They are a way to bridge communication between the divine and earthly worlds. It is the incorporation of polyrhythms in Casino Salsa that reflect a vestige of an African artistic identity.
[10] Cuba's economic depression after the fall of the Soviet bloc.

ELEGANCE, EXCLUSIVITY, AND EXOTICISM:

PRE-REVOLUTIONARY TOURISTIC CASINO PERFORMANCES

After being first introduced to Casino Salsa as a dance genre in Cuba in 2013, I became overwhelmed with questions. I immediately thought to read on the genre, but to my surprise only one book addressed the complex origins of Casino Salsa. Once I read Barbara Balbuena's book *Casino and Salsa in Cuba,* I realized that she was the only scholar to have conducted an investigation that primarily focused on this dance form within its historical context. She outlined Casino Salsa's history by investigating its European influences, racial implications, and political impacts since1950. Although her work mapped a linear sociopolitical choreographic history, my conversations about Casino Salsa to my host family, friends, and professors varied. Casino Salsa seemed to be veiled by multiple truths created by its concealed origins.

During my interviews and casual conversations people had conflicting ideas of Casino Salsa's history. When I spoke with musicians, a majority of them would refer to Casino Salsa as a "baile de la calle [a street dance]" (Ivan & Renier, 2013). However, when I spoke with dancers that were educated within the *bailes espectaculos* (spectacle dance performance) curriculum[11], they described a history of Casino that more or less affirmed Balbuena's research. Additionally, my interview with Victor most clearly demonstrated the exclusivity of this Casino spaces that would not have allowed *Cubanos*

[11] In Cuba, many athletes and performers are selected to attend specialized institutions for secondary school. They receive training in their respective fields. Regarding *Escuelas de Espectaculos*, schools of spectacle training, dancers do gain valuable academic and artistic training in bailes populares (popular dances).

Negros to enter. Victor, now works for the Martin Luther King Jr. Center in Cuba, and was once a performer for the prestigious Tropicana Night Club. He performed there during its prime, but could not tell me much very much about the social dancing aspect of it. As a dancer, he performed his set and would immediately go backstage and leave the venue. As a *bailarin Negro* (Black dancer), he was only allowed to perform, and not witness the rest of the performances that thrived within those 1950s evening shows. These various compelling connections that people perceived to be the origins of Casino Salsa illustrate just how veiled in exclusivity these spaces were at the time. That even nearly 50 years later, the dance seems to have been socially accepted as enigmatic and contradictory.

As I began to ask more people, the majority would agree to the notion of Casino as "el baile de la calle." According to my dance instructor and professor of dance at the University of Havana, Edicta Sherwood, Casino's social reputation was immensely impacted by revolutionary changes to transform these previously exclusive spaces into communal inclusive spaces. This would explain the various truths surrounding Casino's origins. In this chapter, I seek to better understand the social relationships within casinos of the 1950s by opening the curtains to the stages that so few CDA, specifically *Cubanos Negros*, got to see first hand.

Tropicalizing Cuba for the Tourist Imagination: Prelude to Casino Salsa

In the 1950s Cuba and the United States had a strong political and economic relationship and American leaders worked closely with Cuban leader Fulgencio Batista, who would later be overthrown by the revolution. Batista took power as president in

1940, with the aid of his populist image as a military leader who helped remove Gerardo Machado's authoritarian regime in 1933, and with U.S. backing. Batista's support of American business and trade was initial part of his goal to progress the Cuban state. However he basically turned Cuba into a U.S. neo-colony and opened Cuba for taking.[12] The U.S. control "over 40% of Cuban sugar industry, 23% of non-sugar industry, 90% of telephone and electric services, and 50% of Cuba's railway services" (Sweig, 19). By the 1950s Cuba had developed an image in the U.S. and other parts of the Western world as a tropical tourists paradise—the "Pearl of the Antilles"—due to its natural beauty, port locations, and valuable resources 90 miles away from the Floridian coast (Goodman, 4). Imagined as abroad as a tropical paradise, "pleasure [enjoyment, satisfaction, gratification, delight] became the island's business" to be enjoyed for a price (Schwartz, xxi). The capital city, Havana, "long a tourist destination for Americans, experienced a boom in the sex and gambling industries (Sweig, 19).

Tropicalisms constitute "a system of ideological fictions … scripted in Europe and United States … [and] over determined for the Caribbean (Aparicio, 1). Tropicalized images of Cuba arose in part from the effort to market pleasure for sale with sexualized constructs of the patron saint of the island, the Virgin de la Caridad del Cobre (Our Lady of Charity). Local constructs, which associated this saint with West African orisha, Ochun, render her a mulatta (Poey, 57). But tropicalizations of Cuba transformed her into a sexualized metaphor of the island as "the mistress of pleasure, the lush and

[12] Neocolonialism denotes the "continued economic domination of newly 'independent' territories by their formal imperial overlords" (Smith, 159).

opulent goddess of delights (Wild). This amounted to a fetishization of the Other with stereotypical characteristics of sex, sexuality, and sensuality, part of a 20th century colonial gaze and sense of entitlement in which wealthy consumers constructed and fully promoted the exotic experiences of sexuality that they were willing to pay for. In the 1950s posters, pamphlets, and postcards helped to shape the discourse of this tropicalism of Cuba to the global arena.

Casino Spaces

Casino Salsa earns its name from exclusivity, because at its start it was limited to casino spaces[13]. Much like the United States of the time, Cuban public spaces were racially segregated. In general, social "clubs" were segregated racially into that for whites and for blacks and "even, in some cities there were some for mulattoes" (Balbuena 28). In general, social "clubs" were segregated racially into that for whites and for blacks and "even, in some cities there were some for mulattoes" (Balbuena 28). White clubs had Casino Salsa and cabaret style performances, while black[14] nightclubs focused on the social performance of rumba and danzon. By virtue of this de facto segregation based on racial identity, the pre-revolutionary Cuban state regulated access to dance spaces.

Casinos spaces were not only exclusively white, but also provided the environment for gambling and criminal activity by high-profile clients. In the 1950s

[13] To avoid the likely confusion of place and dance genre I will capitalize the "C" in Casino Salsa, the dance, and use the lowercase "c" (as in casino) to indicate the location and space where the dance was performed.

[14] I capitalize "B" in Black to present a more empowering image of a marginalized racial identity and therefore validate it in my academic work. I find no need to capitalize the "w" in white, because disparities in power already privilege this group in Cuban society.

American mafia members were partially responsible for Havana's "dark, corrupt and sordid side to it. Organized crime from the United States owned, or partially owned, many of the gambling establishments" (Staten, 82). Only one of the total of five legal casinos Cuba had a Cuban owner and operator. Casino culture exalted the criminal accumulation of wealth, and thus promoted delinquency as power and liberation. It portrayed Cuba as "the island of sin, a society consumed by the illnesses of gambling, the Mafia, and prostitution" (Farber) and earned Casino owners tremendous revenue from the popularity of the activities that took place within the establishments.

Casino spaces were also the site of opulent nightclub performances that best resembled American variety shows and that were staged for the predominantly American tourist audience. These nightclub shows "attracted major performers, Cuban, American, and European" (English, xii). For example, Josephine Baker performed a vaudeville performance in Cuba in 1950. The shows comprised small performances like burlesque, jazz, rumba, swing, and son (Fox & Lowinger). Their variety format reflected the artistic tastes of the elite clientele. Many American owned casinos were considered first-class cabarets, a rank attained from the quality of performance acts, price, and racial exclusivity (Moore 38). Casinos thus appealed to the interests and aesthetics of upper class citizens, through a performance of excess and dominance. Wealthy *Cubanos Blancos* and Americans reiterated their power by paying to enter, gambling and, all in all, showing that they possessed the "look" for access into these incredibly exclusive spaces.

I believe that in pre-revolutionary Cuba race played a pivotal role in the social relations at elite clubs. CDA who even rose to national [musical] prominence and were celebrated by a broad array of citizens… were at times denied access to hotels and exclusive restaurants" (Steig, 32). However, CDA were not physically absent from the casinos. They were the musicians who provided musical accompaniment or represented the voluptuous bodies of an exotic Other. Performances appealed to the desires of an elite audience that wanted no association with CDA, unless that kind of Cuban was performing an exotic identity on the stage. More or less, casinos allowed Cuban orchestra musicians and rumba dancers of African descent to perform, but not to interact closely with the paying customers in the space. They were only to entertain the guests' fantasies from afar. Americans therefore promoted casinos as liminal spaces, simultaneously Cuban and non-Cuban: Cuban to the extent it signified the tourist clientele's imagined exoticness of Cuba with the display of black bodies but non-Cuban in sense that casinos were purposefully and tactfully constructed to give the clientele ability to gamble and partake in the voyeuristic pleasure of seeing the racial Other on stage without actually engaging with that Other in close proximities.[15] Casinos spaces were thus hyperbolic representations of a fictive cultural reality that only held true within the walls of the social club.

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[15] The nature of segregation and exclusivity at the casinos is similar to what Richard Schechner observes about late 19th Century New Orleans Mardi Gras in, *Street is the a Stage*. Mardi Gras was intended to attract tourists and featured masqueraders parading, attending exclusive balls, and displaying public drunkenness. By fostering the performance of "bourgeois ruling class pretending to have even greater power and authority," the festival served as "a hyperbolic display of social relations." Blacks could not attend the white Mardi Gras ball "except as servants or sex chattels" (74).

Racial prejudice in the casinos of Cuban nightlife reflected the prevalence of the "white racial frame," part of which probably an American influence in and cultural import to the Cuban space. The white racial frame, the deeply ingrained product of a racially oppressive history, legitimizes, rationalizes, and shapes racial oppression and inequality and entails the century-long "racial construction of societal reality" by whites (Feagin, x). It systemically and overtly excludes/marginalizes people of color on the belief in an innate white virtuosity and superiority. In the case of Cuba, a white racial frame allowed Americans to impose their perceptions of and fantasies about foreign culture and sell it as truth. Indeed, people across racial lines were also implicated in this—people of color can also perpetuate the white racial frame—in that a system conditions everyone within it. People across racial and class lines in pre-revolutionary Cuba idealized the American way of life and expressed this in their consumption of (or, at least, desire for) American goods. In the casinos, this idealization came with the baggage of America's relatively more intense, overt and institutionalized racism. The white racial frame therefore played and important role in defining the development of Casino salsa in the casino spaces.

Posters

During the 1950s posters advertising Cuba for American tourists, created and promoted the image of Cuba as woman and Cuban women as exotic and sexual beings with the use of images of sexualized femininity. Majority of images used for national touristic campaigns depicted a voluptuous white woman with *rumbera* costuming. To

me, the costuming of *Cubanas Blancas* as CDA on stage seemed incredibly problematic during a time of rigid racial segregation.

Cuba never formally implemented racial segregation, but nevertheless it was not free of racial discrimination. Batista himself, a mulatto who the *pueblo* first regarded as a symbol of racial diversity and inclusive national identity, remained isolated from a "high society" that wanted to control this "a poorly educated mulatto with little political experience" (Whitney, 149-150). Yet, under him, Cuban society mirrored that of the U.S. in its exclusion of *Cubanos Negros* from certain social spaces like casinos, nightclubs, restaurants, and communities (Balbuena, 26).[16] Rumba, a lower-class black dance, was something from which white (mostly elite) Cubans of this era normally disassociated in social spaces, yet still projected in their depiction of Cuban dances in touristic performances in casinos (Daniel, 177). Interestingly while poster advertisements depicted women in rumba costumes and with "black" voluptuous bodies, it rendered these women with white faces (See fig. 3 and 4).

[16] So rigid was the segregation that allegedly Batista himself could not enter some of these spaces during his presidency in the 1940s (Moore, 38).

Figure 3: American Advertisement for Cuban Cruise (1953)

In rendering the women with stereotypical black bodies and the creation of a false image dictated by Western desire highlights the falsehood of the advertising in the 1950s. Being that these Cuban advertisements promoted a sense of sexuality through the white voluptuous bodies, it was a direct tactic to appeal American interests to experience the island of beautiful exotic women who resemble white Americans, except they had been raised within the Cuban society. This overt whitening of Cuban culture created false conceptions of Cuban life through performance. These images fueled the notion that "Cubans filled tourist advertisements with invitations to consumers of filmed fantasy to realize their dreams of romance and adventure on an island of pleasure. A trip to Cuba, a little rum and rumba, were movies-come-true for throngs of bankers, lawyers,

industrials, teachers, sales clerks, and housewives who boarded steamships bound for Havana" (Schwartz, 14). Cuban and American advertisements of the 1950s did not illustrate Cuba's natural beauty. Instead, they highlighted the image of Cuba through display of performances of sexuality and problematic depictions of women. The depiction of Cuba as the "glittering fun Capital of the Caribbean," which objectified its beautiful, white, curvaceous, and Caribbean cultured women as the ideal beauties (Fox & Lowinger, 168). It reduced them to just another "fun" experience while abroad. Cuban nightlife became characterized as "a place where powerful, rich, married men, chased after the country's most exquisite women"

This incredible contradiction portrays the ill representation of Cuban social life during the 1950s, but by the early twentieth century, these mixed and blended with Spanish and French melodic elements to create the variety of musical styles, like *son*- the precursor to what is now known as salsa" (Fox & Lowinger, 51).

Tropicalization marked most of the advertisements during this time. In the case of Cuba, the privileged generalized tropicalized images, which was undoubtedly an act of hegemonic dominance over the Cuban state. Advertisements helped illustrate the constant political tug-of-war between the real and complex representation of Cuba within its borders, and the Cuba that was marketable abroad. In Cuba, the tropicalization in advertisements was very unique because it attempted to appeal to the interests of American construction of the Cuban life. The Cuban Tourism Commission under the Batista regime, in many ways whitewashed Cuban culture through a series of images and promotional rhetoric that purported problematic characteristics of women.

Figure 4: Cuban Tourist Commission Advertisement (1950).

This reflected an interest to experience the Cuba tourists imagined, not necessarily one that actually existed. This touristic market for pleasure is clearly displayed in the portrayal of women as sexual objects within Casino Salsa as well as the overall image of the Cuban nation as representative of a *mulata* woman. The colonial gaze on the tourist images of women in the 1950s is clearly seen in advertisements aimed to spark interest in the Cuban experience. Romanticized images of the island led to a whitened image of its people, an over sexualization of its women, and a general emphasis on its accessible foreignness that directly affected the performance of Casino Salsa in Cuba.

Not only did Cuba provide the United States with tobacco, sugar, and coffee, but it also gave wealthy Americans the opportunity to seek the "infusion of foreign capital

that built Havana's Las Vegas- type hotel casinos" (Schwartz, 128). Additionally, Cuba gave Americans the place and space to perform their affluence in and out side of the Casino social clubs. For example, during the 1950s "hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, and casinos sprung up in Havana catering to the rich jet-setters seeking luxury. Socialites, debutantes… and American mobsters came to play in the Cuban paradise" (Wild). These elites who dominated casino spaces and performances exemplified the American need to experience a Cuba they felt was authentic, and the Cuban desire to embody American cultural and performative excess.

These images directly speak to the power of casino clubs as well. Casinos were the only venues that displayed gambling, power, status, and prowess in one space. Cuba, the voluptuous *rumbera* performer, appeals to Western ideals of beauty and the American desire to gamble and partake in the voyeuristic pleasures that Casino Salsa offers through performance.

Pamphlets

Not only were some of the advertisements surrounding performances based in a visual representation of beauty and exotification, but also these sentiments were also explicit in the rhetoric of travel pamphlets. Pamphlets during the 1950s included many examples of alliteration that spoke to Cuba's mystical and foreign appeal. For example, advertisements had titles like "Fascinating, Foreign, Fabulous" or "Magical, Musical, Matchless." These titles simplified Cuban culture to easily digestible adjectives that could be marketed to the tourists. In many pamphlets, the dancers were phenotypically white heterosexual couple. However, the audiences and consumers of Cuban culture as

depicted in these pamphlets were jovial white Americans. Clothing became one of the biggest markers that differentiated Cubanness from Americanness in these illustrations. Cubans were depicted as tropical beings with feathered hats, glittery bustiers, long ruffled skirts, and high heels. Meanwhile, the Americans in the pictures were completely covered up in professional attire while in casinos, and the only sign of any bare skin when depicting an American couple at was at the Varadero Beach[17]. Cuba seemed to be a stagnant, foreign, and primitive place. As stated by Aparicio, "historically, the tropics are identified for the West not only by their warmth but also by their primitiveness their striking remoteness from the conditions of the developing modern state" (Aparicio, 213). Cuba was a cultural experience for the American consumers, which was constructed by rhetoric that characterized it as possessing "Latin gayety… friendly old atmosphere… sparkling beaches… try your luck at the Casino… visit the nightclubs… enjoy fascinating fiestas and sports galore" (Figure 6). These overarching statements about the population as a whole did not represent Cuba. Their depictions of Cuban nightlife defined the character and impression of revolutionary performances of Casino.

[17] Varadero Beach is considered to be one of Cuba's most pristine beaches and a major tourist hot spot .In my experience in Cuba, many tourists called it the "Las Vegas of the Caribbean" (2013).

Figure 5: Cuban Tourist Commission Advertisement (1952).

Figure 6: Cuban Tourist Commission Advertisement (1953)

Postcards

Postcards also helped construct the images of Cuba –including with the mulata— that defined the performance of Casino Salsa in the social clubs. Figure 7 is a Cuban postcard that was sold during the 1950s, and epitomized the problematic relationship between Cuban *mulata* and rich American white man. She is light skinned and incredibly beautiful. She is his cultural souvenir from his trip to Cuba, which further objectifies her.

Figure 7: Postcard from the Instituto Cubano de Turismo (1950s).

"Spectacle is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (Debord 4). It can be used to cultivate a false or incomplete idea of the Other, In pre-revolutionary Cuba, poster advertisements, travel pamphlets, and postcards all carefully constructed a Cuban identity that made Cuba marketable to the American public. It clearly marginalized the perspective of the masses, by representing the unidimentional interests, perceptions and fantasies of the elite few. They established the foundation of objectification and oversexualization that was present in performances within the casinos.

Casino Salsa in Performance

Casino Salsa took its basic form under the Batista regime. It is a dance that earns its name from exclusivity. At its start it was limited to casino spaces, the site of opulent

nightclub shows that best resembled American variety shows and were staged for a predominantly American tourist audience. These shows entailed small performances like burlesque, jazz, rumba, swing, and son (Fox & Lowinger). Their variety format reflected the interests and aesthetics of their elite clientele and "attracted major performers, Cuban, American and European" (English, xii). Only one of the five legal casinos had a Cuban owner and operator. Many American owned casinos in Cuba were considered first-class cabarets, a rank based on the quality of performance acts and price, (Moore 38). Wealthy, *Cubanos Blancos* and Americans reiterated their power and privilege by showing their ability to pay to enter, and free spending on gambling. Casinos spaces provided the environment for gambling and criminal activity by high-profile clients. Organized crime from the U.S. owned, or partially owned, many of the gambling establishments" and were partially responsible for the "dark, corrupt and sordid side" Havana was reputed to have (Staten, 82). Casino culture therefore exalted criminal accumulation of wealth and promoted delinquency as power and liberation. It presented Cuba as "the island of sin…consumed by the illnesses of gambling, the Mafia, and prostitution" (Farber) and earned casino owners tremendous revenue from the popularity of what took place in the establishments.

Casinos were hyperbolic representations of a fictive cultural reality that only held true within the walls of the club. The owners promoted their clubs as liminal spaces—simultaneously Cuban and non-Cuban. They promoted the spaces *as non-Cuban* by purposefully appealing to the desires of a free-spending audience for little association

with black people.[18] As I noted earlier, Cuban public spaces in the 1950s had began to mirror that of U.S. in racial segregation: for whites and blacks and "in some cities … for mulattoes" (Balbuena 28). Clubs that opened their doors for *Cubanos Negros* featured rumba and danzon, whereas white clubs featured Casino Salsa and cabaret style performances. White clubs proscribed blacks explicitly or by tactic understanding." Even black artists with national prominence and whom "a broad array of citizens" celebrated "were at times denied access to hotels and exclusive restaurants" (Steig, 32). Cubans, themselves, idealized American culture in their consumption of (or desire for) American goods. In casinos, this idealization came with the baggage of America's institutionalized racism.[19] Simultaneously, casino owners promoted the clubs *as Cuban* by feeding tourists' fantasied imaginations of Cuba with displays of an exotic black Other. Thus *Cubanos Negros* had a presence in the casinos, marginal at best, as orchestra musicians and rumba dancers, to entertain customers from afar—to provide

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accompaniment and/or represent the voluptuous bodies of an exotic Other, but not to interact closely with clients in the space.

American Consumerism: Casino Figuras and American Commodities

Casino performances were incredibly popular and were representative of elite Cuban nightlife in how they connected wealthy Cubans to an American ideal. White Cuba idealized the American way of life and mimicked it to mark its own wealth and status. Thus, during the 1950s, the choreography of Casino Salsa moved its antecedents like son, danzon, cha cha, waltz, and contradance to the background, and incorporated the now popular Jazz and Rock-n-roll phrases or stylistic choices into *figuras* that were performed within the *rueda de Casino*.[20] Movement became more jovial and less sensual to reflect the Western technicality of Jazz. Evidence of Rock-n-roll in Casino Salso performances are "small jump[s] … in the figure to open and close and, also, a turn around of the arms holding the partner (the right of the woman and left of the man) that, undoubtedly (Balbuena, 32). These clearly paid homage to an idealized image of America as the producer of entertaining music and dance styles worth learning. A majority of wealthy Cubans viewed American artistic genres with reverence, and this was overtly evident in Casino Salsa *figuras* that had the explicitly Jazz and Rock-n-Roll influences, and in the incorporation of American English to identify Casino *figuras*.

[20] Elegant venues like Tropicana promoted Jazz as the main influence on Casino. In many ways "Tropicana was *the* place for jazz in Cuba ": it marked the space with a special type of privilege by association with the genre (Fox & Lowinger, 169). In addition to Jazz, Rock-n-Roll also gained popularity within the youth that were fascinated by American music of the 1950s. Rock-n-Roll "was the biggest musical craze in the US …peaking around 1953, and it has been fabulously recycled as nostalgia" (Fox & Lowinger, 166).

During the 1950s, Casino Salsa incorporated Jazz and Rock-n-Roll choreographies into *figuras* that were performed within the *rueda de Casino*. Dancers created short choreographic phrases or stylistic choices that represented the American popularized genres of Jazz and Rock-n-Roll. Elegant venues like Tropicana promoted Jazz as its main influence in Casino. In many ways "Tropicana was *the* place for jazz in Cuba, " because it marked the space with a special type of privilege by association with the genre (Fox & Lowinger, 169). The dances reflected an elegant style that Cubans attempted to replicate in their own bodies. Movement became more jovial and a bit less sensual to reflect the Western technicality of Jazz. In addition to Jazz, Rock-n-Roll also gained popularity within the youth that were fascinated by American music of the 1950s. Rock-n-roll "was the biggest musical craze in the US …peaking around 1953, and it has been fabulously recycled as nostalgia" (Fox & Lowinger, 166). These performances of Rock-n-Roll appeared in Casino performances when the youth incorporated "small jump[s] … in the figure to open and close and, also, a turn around of the arms holding the partner (the right of the woman and left of the man) that, undoubtedly, [came] from rock and roll" (Balbuena, 32). These clearly paid homage to an idealized image of America as the producer of entertaining music and dance styles worth learning. A majority of wealthy Cubans viewed American artistic genres with reverence, and this was overtly evident in Casino Salsa *figuras* that had explicitly Jazz and Rock-n-Roll influences, and in the incorporation of American English to identify Casino *figuras*.

The Casino Salsa *figuras* of the 1950s indicate that Cubans had given the dance a transnational quality. What is more, Casino Salsa choreographers now named *figuras*

after the commodities that American businesses provided the Cuban state. Wealthy Cubans voluntarily performed *figuras* or dance steps like Susie Q (from the Rock-n-Roll American band Creedence Clearwater Revival), Sweater, Kentucky, Pizza Hut, and Coca Cola. These *figuras* gained popularity across Havana nightlife, because they referenced aspects of American culture that Cubans admired. The *figuras* of the 1950s illustrated the idealization of American people, musical trends, and consumer goods. These *figuras* clearly show the power of American consumerism within Cuba and in embodied performance. American tourists and Cuban elites were socially conditioned to consume symbols of American culture as a way of attaining the successes the symbols appear to represent. Casino Salsa, directly affected by this consumption, embodied the aspirations and perspectives of wealthy Cubans of the time who had a romanticized image of the American state but still wanted to maintain something of its "most genuine cultural values" in a Cuban national dance (Balbuena, 34).

Figure 8: Screenshot from "Nostalgia Cubana" (1955). It depicts Son (Casino antecedent) dancers in a club.

Casino Embodies Interests of the Touristic Cuban Experience

All in all, pre-Revolutionary Cuba promoted an imagined reality—a fantasy—of the island. In social clubs, performance of Casino Salsa highlighted perceptions of American cultural and economic power and perpetuated images of Cuba that did not represent the nation as a whole. At a time when the disaffections that led to the 1959 revolution were very much palpable, casinos became spaces to escape from the violence and political unrest, and live out "the American dream, Cuban style" (Fox & Lowinger, 158). The elites in these exclusive spaces performed their privilege with Casino Salsa dance choreographies. They danced in ways that represented the opulence of tropical performance and asserted their own individuality into the Casino choreographic canon through the inclusion of several "transnational" *figuras*. Casino Salsa thus embodies something of Cuba's history, particularly a trajectory of power within it. In the 1950s, Cuba was largely dominated by the power and opinions of those who had economic status, and their contributions to the genre are still incorporated into *ruedas de Casino*. The elite Cuban and American population during this time left their mark on the genre in choreographic symbols that represented the complex power dynamics of the 1950s. Casino Salsa embodied the power that the held above the masses, but shortly after the triumph of the revolution that would change completely.

The U.S. had much to gain from its most profitable neocolony but the relationship was incredibly detrimental to many Cubans. It put the largest amount of wealth into the hands of a small amount of people. About 1.5 million Cubans were jobless or "belonged to the rural poor" while about 900,000 wealthy ones "controlled

43% of the country's income" (Chomsky, 28). People became cogs in the machine of capitalism—fueling the machine without opportunity for their own socioeconomic mobility. Uneven distribution of wealth reinforced racial distinctions.

Batista's regime itself quickly developed the same greed that had plagued his predecessors and ignored the needs of the people that he once spoke for. He found ways to funnel revenue from coffee, sugar, and tobacco into the pockets of the small group of rich and wealthy people in both countries (Farber). Therefore, he had "great appeal with wealthy elite Cubans" but faced the "disapproval of the labor force." Trade with the U.S. "selfishly benefitted him," but created political unrest amongst working class groups in the domestic sector (Staten, 65). Lack of social mobility and security forced the *pueblo* to seek to voice their political concerns. Batista tried to manage the political challenge by censoring public negative opinions of Cuban politics and sponsoring a narrow view of Cuba that represented the perspective of the powerful few. These came at the price of his image as an advocate for the people. The "populist" with the "burnished … democratic credentials," became the "neosultanistic" dictator (Perez-Stable, 50). In 1952 he ran for reelection knowing his declining popularity amongst the *pueblo*. Yet, when he lost, he staged a coup d'état to overthrow the winner Carlos Prio from office, bypassing the popular vote to take and secure power by his connection to and backing from the U.S.[21] He and the military then moved to … protect the security of American-owned

[21] The "ease with which Batista took over, underscored the weakness of Cuba's political institutions and the tendency toward violence that pervaded the political process" (Suchlicki, 132).

properties by clamping down on unrest, violently at times" (Sweig, 17). Backlash from the *pueblo* and was a central impetus of the revolution that would follow

The presence of American culture and business could be "felt across the island … From boxes of Kellogg's Corn Flakes and Coca-Cola, to New York Fashions … Ford automobiles" and "American tourists" (33). By 1958, American investments in Cuba approached a billion dollars. "The Chase Manhattan Bank, Proctor and Gamble, Colgate, Texaco, Goodyear, Remington, Borden, Sears, Ford, US Rubber, Standard Oil all had substantial holdings on the island" (Russo, 4). These influences increased Cuban people's idealization of American businesses and lifestyle that permeated through the dance floor and infiltrated the Casino Salsa choreography in the 1950s.

EN LA SANGRE:

PERFORMING AFRICA IN REVOLUTIONARY CASINO

Since my original trip to Cuba in 2013, I had the privilege of meeting with dancers and their families during leisure time outside of our curriculum in the Centro International de Arte (CIArte). Speaking with Yadira[22] (a friend's mother) one evening over coffee and looking through family albums illustrated the complexities of being *familia Negra*, Black family, during the time directly after the triumph of the revolution. Yadira showed me pictures of her accompanied by a multitude of young people hiking up a mountain during the Literacy Campaign of 1961. She mentioned her involvement as a young Black educator, and how empowered she felt to be used in the revolution. As the pictures continued chronicle her journey into adulthood, I could see her continue to progress in career. In many pictures, she was the only *Cubana Negra* in her office. She mentioned being "muy coqueta y muy fina [very coquette and refined young woman]."

As she began to work, she became close to a man named Antonio[23], an assertive, professional, and stoic manager that identified as *Cubano Negro*, which she ended up marrying and building a life with. Her and Antonio eventually moved to Pogoloti, and continued to work towards the goals of the revolution. As she showed me a picture of her now late husband, she mentioned a shift in their relationship. During the 1960s, religious affiliation of any sort jeopardized ones ability to even apply for jobs in politics and the military. Antonio ran for Comité de la Defensa de la Revolución (CDR), which

[22] Pseudonym used to protect informant's identity.
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was a local position of power. CDR's were viewed as the vanguard of the revolution who would uphold the aims of the revolution within their communities. As a Yoruba religious practicing family, Yadira had to give up many of her religious customs and spiritual rituals in order to not jeopardize her husband's chances at such a prestigious political position. She spoke about the sacrifices people made at the time to balance their religious identities alongside their political ideologies. She recalled him ripping the prayers that she wrote on napkins and placed under her children's pillows at night, and pouring out cups of water that represented spiritual ancestors. It was a difficult time of paradox, complexity, and the balance between what is beneficial for the *pueblo* and what was important to the individuals.

Yadira's openness with me was incredibly humbling and appreciated. She helped me understand that the mixed feelings of religion and politics within her own family paralleled the sentiment of many *familias Negras* felt at the time. *Familias Negras* felt the pressures of simultaneous empowerment and (dis)empowerment within a state that did not fully accept the racial and religious identities that affected conscious community of CDA as a whole. These complex understandings of the religious and revolutionary self created a strategic essentialist idea of religious marginalization that ultimately helped establish cultural intimacy in the CDA community in years following the triumph of the revolution. According to Hertzfeld, the complicated relationship between nation-state and essentialism is as "distant and unreachable enemies of everyday experiences and to understanding them" and motivates us to instead view them "as integral aspects of social life" (Hertzfeld, 2). These aspects reject a static truth, and embrace the complex

relationship of marginalization within the state, which allows people to perform these multiplicitous identities in society. This would help explain the simultaneous empowerment within the self and dis(empowerment) within the nation-state that creates cultural intimacy among CDA religious practitioners in post-revolutionary Cuba.

The Cuban revolution marked an important political and cultural negotiation of a CDA identity on the island. After the revolution CDA worked to displace derogatory connotations of Blackness and to celebrate an African consciousness in social spheres by incorporating gestures, choreographies, and structures of movement inspired by Yoruba orishas, into Casino Salsa.[24] By this they inserted and asserted themselves in a dance form that previously reflected the rigid segregation of pre-revolutionary Cuba and created inclusive social spaces that did not previously exist. I am not making the claim that performance itself generates a complex African consciousness, displays of post-revolutionary African consciousness—religious and racial understandings of the self—were manifested in the performance of popular culture.

Revolutionary Cuba: Foundation for Casino Salsa's New Repertoire

During the 1950s, a phenotypically *Cubano Blanco* lawyer named Fidel Castro Ruz offered the Cuban pueblo an alternative to the Batista dictatorship in the form of a Communist revolution. As the rebel army acquired momentum, it ultimately seized power on July 26, 1959. Whereas most of the marginalized populations celebrated the triumph of the revolution, the counter-revolutionaries, mostly wealthy *Cubanos Blancos*,

[24] "People group who originated from what today is known as southern Nigeria. The name is believed to mean 'cunning." Sub-ethnic groups include Oyo, Dahomey, and Benin" (de la Fuente, 234).

fled to the United States seeking political asylum. This first wave of migration changed the racial demographics of the island. CDA now accounted for 40% of the Cuban population and supported the Communist party's goals of creating social and economic equality (Sweig, 53). The reforms of the Communist party gave CDA the ability to own the land they worked as well as residential land, and to earn fair wages. The biggest changes in Cuban politics by the revolution were institutional reforms towards more equality for the previously oppressed by destroying the prevailing oppressive systems of power on the island.

The reforms by the revolution were extremely effective in increasing the moral of the Cuban people. However, Fidel Castro expressed an aspect of his political stance that shocked and worried many people. In an interview in 1961, he said " Yo he sido, soy, y sere marxista-leninista hasta la muerte [I have been, am, and will continue to be a Marxist-Leninist until death]" (Castro, 1961). As he uttered those words, many religious people in Cuba grew very worried about their place within the revolution.

After the declaration of a Marxist-Leninist ideology, religious leaders of all sects worried about how the revolution would adequately represent them. Separation grew between the state and the church. When Catholic churches developed the reputation for "sheltering counter revolutionary activity in the early days of the revolution" the revolution developed an incredible anti-religious stance (Ayorinde, 104).

The revolution did not accommodate a spectrum between religious and revolutionary ideology: it saw them purely as antonyms that could not coexist within the same body—you were either religious or revolutionary, you could not be both.

During my first trip to Cuba, I studied abroad through the Martin Luther King Jr. Center in Havana, which was founded by the progressive and revolutionary pastor in Pogoloti, Raul Ramirez Suarez, of the Iglesia Bautista Ebenezer. I had the opportunity to know him and his family during my 3-month stay there. He spoke candidly about the effect that these words had on him. He identities himself as a Christian revolutionary, considered an oxymoron during that era, and Fidel's stance resonated with him. He stated being extremely thrilled to be part of the revolution, but the night

> La confession de fe marxista de Fidel contervertia en cenizas la ultima esperanza… me sentia traicionado y enganado por un movimiento que, por su humanista a favor de los sectores mas empobresidos de Cuba, haba conquistador mu simpatia y colaboracion… Tuve pesadillas. Y todasgiraban sobre lo mismo: la persecucion.
> [Fidel's confession of a Marxist faith turned my hopes to ashes… I felt betrayed and deceived by a movement that, for its humanitarian work for impoverished communities, had appealed to my sympathy and collaboration in the revolution… I have nightmares. All of which illustrated the same thing: persecution]" (Suarez Ramos, 320)

The Cuban state did not outlaw religion, but religion had no place in its Marxist-Leninist model of communism. In the 1960s, "diciendole a un gerente del partido que eras christiano era como decir que eras el enemigo del estado [telling a general of the party that you were Christian, was directly calling yourself the enemy of the state]" (Marcelo, 2015). Religious participation of any kind resulted in the participants' inability to hold a position in the National Communist Party (PCC) (Marcelo, 2015).

This foundation of religious persecution and institutionalized racial equality provided the contradiction between empowerment and (dis)empowerment for CAD in Cuba. In revolutionary Cuba, the negative views of a racial Blackness in the pre-revolutionary era were replaced with negative counterrevolutionary connotations of a

conscious Blackness. Religious affiliation of any sort became the determining factors of upward social mobility within the newly Communist state. People could subvert the previous problematic racial images of Blackness by adopting a revolutionary ideology, even at the expense on one's own identity. Racial Blackness was no longer innately perceived as inferior or subservient at the institutional level, which seemed like advancement for the Black community. However, being that many CDA identified as religious practitioners, this was another way of marginalizing the same population. A nationalist ideology determined privilege, and a religious ideology determined social disenfranchisement within the revolutionary Cuban era. It was this performance of a conscious African identity that subverted the state through Casino Salsa performances.

History Surrounding the Dance of the *Pueblo*

On my second trip to Cuba in 2015, I asked my hosts Daisy and Marcelo how they met, as we sat at table (and later joined by their friend Yumari[25]) for dinner. Their story captured the reality of the complexities of being both a religious person and Communist, in an era when that seemed an oxymoron. Daisy was a devout Christian and Fidelista to the core, and Marcelo solely identified with his role in the PCC. They dated for a few months, but they never talked about religion. This was a very strategic dating tactic to avoid speaking about an obvious "deal breaker." One day, Daisy nervously told Marcelo she was a Christian. To his disbelief, the first thing that came out of his mouth was "*no me puedes decir eso, Cristiana? Porque no me diciste mas temprano* [you can't tell me that, a Christian? Why didn't you tell me that before?!]." Daisy retold the story

[25] Pseudonym used to protect the identity of my informant.

fondly, but admitted to her nervous when she told him. Her complex political and religious identity did not have a name and space in the revolution. She was viewed as a threat to the state and her interest in leadership roles within the communist party was many times turned down.

It had hurt Daisy not to be part of a movement she wholeheartedly believed in, and she admitted to the difficulty of dating Marcelo. He would hide under a tree whenever he waited for her at church. Finally, he stepped in and sat at the back where he cried during the entire sermon, moved by the pastors speech about the privilege of being Cuban, Christian, and revolutionary! Yumaria added:"*si crees que fue dificil para los cristianos en ese entonces, te imagines como la gente trataba a los que practicaban la religion Yoruba*? [if you think it was difficult for Christians during that time, can you imagine how people treated those in the Yoruba religion?]" She explained that CDA who practice Afro-Atlantic religions are marginalized doubly: by Christians and the Communist Party. The others nodded, apparently with complete understanding of the complexities of a period they felt so close to and also quite distant from. Cuba's transition to a Marxist-Leninist political ideology created conflict between race, religion, and revolution. It praised CDA for their cultural and active efforts in the Revolution, but suppressed a major part of their identity, their religious beliefs. In 1962, when the " revolutionary leaders consolidated their authority and merged once diverging political and ideological tendencies into the Cuban Communist Party, all religious faiths faced ostracism. Party membership was proscribed for active believers of any faith" (Steig, 63).

The Revolution clearly addressed the political and economic aspects of equity within a Communist state, but in ways that elided the problem of racial marginalization that threatened to undermine some of those political and economic gains.

People trusted Fidel's claim that "divisions along racial lines would threaten the success of the revolutionary project" (Sweig, 54). He acknowledged the problem of racial discrimination because of the drastic change in racial demographics directly after the first migration of *Cubanos Blancos* to the United States followed the triumph of the Revolution (Chomsky 2011). After the first wave, "CDA represented 40% of the total population. Even if the often soft lines of racial distinction in Cuba undermine the accuracy of this number (Sweig, 53) it does not take away the fact that people of African descent became the majority in Cuba almost overnight. The revolutionary leaders did their best to address racial discrimination on the surface, but did very little to overtly address and educate the masses on how to reject centuries of prejudiced socialization that had marginalized CDA and that fuelled the rise of the revolution in the first place.

After the Revolution, institutional racism seemed eradicated, but social discrimination continued. Fidel attempted to lead the fight to create inclusive performance spaces with the Law 690, which decreed the nationalization of "club societies, dancehalls, etc," and converted them to recreational centers (Balbuena, 49).[26] To open accessibility into arenas that previously limited the participation of CDA in the arts, Fidel's National Council of Culture funded amateur and professional artistic groups. The casino, once a rigidly segregated space, became a symbol of community building.

[26] It also "established some twenty theater groups and [gave] a dozen playwrights state funding" (Martin, 155).

Elite nightclubs became recreational centers "and the birthplace of a new generation of casino dancers (Balbuena, 50). Casino Salsa was one of the first tools the Revolution used to turn the pre-revolutionary "hegemony on its head," and to empower people by removing restrictions on access to the dance genre (Lipsitz, 168). For many CDA, dance had long provided a way to perform their *race* and *religion*, both incredibly influential in construction of self within the Black diasporic experience. For this reason, the Revolution's inability to directly tackle issue of race perpetuated the cycle of racial prejudice in the country.[27]

Casino Salsa dancing communities constituted a subculture for addressing social concerns in a Revolutionary Cuba. The dance served to confront policies that did not align with the original principles by which people had eagerly protested the Batista regime in the first place. Among the dancing communities of Casino Salsa CDA understood that they were part of a "nation whose historical and multi-ethnic [trajectory] led to forging its own culture…"—*Cubanismo*, if you will—a culture that, at its best, values the contributions made "by all the races and social classes" to the development of Casino Salsa (Balbuena, 13). *Cubanismo represents* the mixed character of the Cuban nation, but was an idea that also served the interests of local communities who wished to perform identities that, in many ways, went against the revolution (Moore). For example, in the spirit of *Cubanismo*, CDA demonstrated a complex and reverent understanding of

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[27] Fidel himself admitted that the revolution was a beginning. It was a process that had to go on for a long time … step by step. The revolution in itself had an extraordinary amount of sympathy, for what it had cleared away, not for what it had done, but ideologically, the revolution was weak" (Wilkerson, 68).

their African lineage that directly went against the nationalist rhetoric of the time period. CDA reclaimed Africa as a site of religious and racial empowerment. In the words of one of my interviewees, "race and religion are part of my daily life]" (Yandro, 2015). However, even as the revolution aimed to eradication discriminatory practices, it also succeeded in socially ostracizing all religious practices in the 1960s, especially Catholic and Afro-Atlantic religions. In effect, it worked at ridding CDA from a very religiously defined racial identity, and to reconstruct their identity as primarily a nationalist and revolutionary.

For those who could not overtly practice *religión Yoruba* and maintain an active role in the Communist Party Casino Salsa provided the covert subversive space for orisha performance. Music and dance "have always been among the most democratic of the arts in Cuba, representing forms of expression accessible to minorities that appeal to listeners across class and racial boundaries" (Moore, 4). CDA have long expressed spiritual and racial identities "through popular images, idiomatic expressions, or other cultural references (Steig, 64). Choreographic allusions to Yoruba orisha choreography in Casino was, therefore, not a new tactic; CDA once again felt the need to conceal spirituality through acceptable forms of performance to practice faith in society. CDA "turned hegemony on its head" by using Casino Salsa—originally intended to create a nationalist Cuban identity in post-revolutionary Cuba—as a tool of empowering religious expression, in secular spaces. It is through religious entry that African consciousness is revered for CDA, because it changed the dominant discourse about "the Africanity of Cuba as a threat" that personified "the caricature of the black male *brujo*

and the black *nafiigo,* portrayed as preying principally on innocent white children" (Ryer, 129). For the CDA community, Africa became the reclamation of a rich history that went against the grain of the dominant narrative of Africa as "savage" and "primitive" (Ryer, 130).

By this "African-based religions, in some ways the most subversive and oppositional of the African-based cultural forms, were integrated into national culture" (Andrews, 169). In many ways this exemplified the power of "cultural intimacy [being able to] erupt into public life" (Herzfeld, 3). In the case of Casino Salsa, it integrated into public life through the performance of a CDA identity. While the state intended to use Casino Salsa to create a homogenous nationalist Cuban community, it in reality enacted an African identity through embodied practice in a new canon that now combined rumba, son, danzon, mambo antecedents with Yoruba choreographic articulations.

La Raíz: Orisha in Cuba

Afro-Atlantic religions in revolutionary Cuba have served as a way to preserve a history and culture rooted in an African identity that does not begin with the shackles of slavery or the Middle Passage. It begins with Africa as a sight of knowledge and culture that Europeans attempted to strip away from an entire people. CDA look to Afro-Atlantic religions as a source of pride, and a way to push through the struggles of their enslavement. Its incredible presence in Cuba showed the presence of a voice that was meant to be silences more than twelve generations ago. The method by which Christians of that era chose to convert them was violent, dehumanizing, and gruesome. Enslaved

Africans came in with knowledge of Yoruba, Congo, or Egbo religious beliefs that became Santeria, Palo, and Abakua (Murrell).

Santeria, the most widely practiced in Cuba, syncretizes Yoruba (of Southwestern Nigeria) and Catholic religious beliefs. In Cuba, some refuse to call their religion Santeria and prefer the term *religión Yoruba* or Regla de Ocha. Others use the terms synonymously. In either case, this religion looks to orisha "who act as intermediary beings or servants" or "quasi-dieties which serve as protectors and guides for every human being" (Murrell, 107 & de la Fuente, 233). Orisha are spiritual deities that rule over a natural domain on Earth, and have followers called *hijos* whom they are responsible for watching over and guiding to reach their life's purpose.

There are more than 200 orisha in Santeria, I will describe just the three that predominate Casino in Salsa in Cuban nightlife. Chango is associated with virility, masculinity, expressivity (he is the owner of the dance and the sacred batá drums), violent inclinations, and charm. He is the orisha of fire and thunder. Schweitzer states that "when Changó dances, he grabs lightning bolts from the sky and casts them down on his foes" (77). Ochun's purview is the river. She is patron saint of Cuba and represents the sweetness of life, love, sexuality, youth, and community. In performance, she is "flirtatious [with] alluring eyes, smirking lips (Missouri, 50). Yemaya is considered the mother of orisha. She protects the oceans and played an active role in the creation of the earth (Mason, 15). Yemaya exhibits determination, power, pride, and dominance. Her chin is elevated; her eyes are wide open; and she consistently looks like she is preparing for war and determined to be victorious.

These three orisha evoke the most overt performance qualities in the performance of Casino. They show a clear desire to perform a Yoruba sacred identity within secular performance spaces. I do not believe that this is an attempt to make the secular sacred, but instead a way to perform ones own religious and cultural influences within secular spaces. These Yoruba influences allude to a pride in African roots.

Identity Conundrum: Pride in Africanness and Rejection of Blackness

Race in Cuba is as complex as its history of oppression, marginalization, imperialism, and colonialism. CDA reject the negative connotations of blackness. However, they were socialized within the system that created this negative association. Blackness alluded to an era of enslavement, and did not account for the complex understandings of the self that CDA had worked for centuries to develop. Many CDA combatted the negative associations by establishing a positive connection with their identity in religious terms. If, before the revolution Afro-Atlantic-religions were considered as a "'black problem' associated with a marginality," (Ayorinde,1) it now instilled pride in an African heritage. Perhaps the emphasis on blackness as a consciousness of one's Afro-religious rather than phenotypical allusion to heritage was a way of avoiding a direct attack on the revolution whose goals they mostly supported even if its record on social (and therefore often phenotypically based) racism was quite lacking. Casino Salsa provided a covert subversive space for CDA where they could on one hand continue supporting the goals of a newly liberated Cuba and on the other hand express themselves in their proscribed religion.

The Yoruba movement that CDA embedded into the Casino repertoire reflected the hidden choreographic transcripts within the social dance. According to James C. Scott, hidden transcripts refer to the

> "discourse that takes place 'off stage,' beyond direct observation by power holders. The hidden transcript is thus derivative in the send that it consist of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect was appears in the public transcript" (Scott, 5).

Although Casino is a public transcript dance genre geared towards a cohesive national identity, the nightclubs that fostered choreographic influences that allude to a pride in a Black identity created sequestered social sites that subverted the intentions of the Cuban government. Sequestered social sites are "those locations in which the unspoken riposte, stifled anger, and bitten tongues created by relationships of domination find a vehement, full –throated expression" (Scott, 120). People enact their agency in the moments that perform a pride in the self that recognizes the racial and religious complexities of the individual in spaces that operated outside the dominant political discourse. Due to its original status as the social dance of the rich and wealthy, it simultaneously (dis)empowered the Black community through the need to conceal their cultural practices within choreography. Scott speaks about this phenomenon through the narrative of slavery, and the tactical need to conceal artistic form in order to ensure their longevity. However, he also speaks to the dangers of these hidden choreographic transcripts, as they can also remain unacknowledged and never enacted upon on the larger scale (Scott, 16). Although I completely understand Scott's concern, I do believe that Casino has provided CDA with much more than a space to perform their identities. It has been able to create communities through similar techniques within the body. In

many cases, people will know who is religious or not by the choreography that people choose to enact. In this way, the hidden transcript is active in community building and creating solidarity amongst those in a similar struggle.

CDA with a complex African consciousness did not endorse notions of black Cubanness because it carried dark connotations of an African heritage. They did not want to support the sentiment that black was inferior, problematic, and imperfect, so they clearly marked the distinction between *Cubano Negro* (Black Cuban) [28] and *Cubano negro* (black Cuban)[29]. One was a term of endearment in social conversations, while the other fraught with centuries of inferiority. According to Henry Louis Gates:

> The black Cuban discriminates against his Brother and is violent to him
> And even though he has no master, he crawls like a worm
> He has nothing of his own because his self- esteem and pride are
> Broken
> The black Cuban is the rubbish of his island" (Gates, 218).

The revolution did little to directly educate people on their previously socially conditioned racial prejudices, so the negative implications of blackness continued to emerge in daily conversations. Robin Moore explains these contemporary manifestations of blackness as:

> Aside from over classification of *negro, mulato*, and *blanco* (black, mulatto, white), Cubans make further distinctions that betray a strong bias against physical features considered African-derived in favor of those of European origin. Racial terms heard in everyday conversation include *mulato adelantado* ("evolved" mulatto), used to describe light-skinned mulattos with predominantly Caucasian features, *mulato blanconazo (*very white mulatto), a mulatto with so few African-derived physical features as to pass for white, *jaba'o,* a person of light skin color but overtly Negroid features; trigueño (wheat-colored), a relatively light-

[28] A term of endearment and empowerment.
[29] A derogatory term meant to hinder the image of Blackness.

> skinned mulatto or Hispanic with pelo bueno,; *negro azul* ('blue' negro), a Negro so dark that skin appears to have a bluish cast; and *indio* (Indian), a mulatto with physical features and/or skin tone that suggests descent from the island's indigenous population" (Moore, 14).

This consumption of a white racial frame promoted the internalized racism present in these daily conversations surrounding Blackness. According to Fanon, this can be better understood as the psychology of oppression. It addresses the psychology and actions of the oppressors and their affects on the oppressed. In many cases, this internalized racism can have

> "self-destructive consequences of violence imposed on the oppressed: The victim of oppression feels 'hemmed in' when he internalizes the self-negating prohibitions of the oppressor. He initially adopts avoidance reactions… At the collective, this repressed counter violence exhausts itself through vigorous dances, sexual escapades, symbolic killings, and exaggerated beliefs in terrifying myth" (Abdilahi Bulhan, 142)

Every category that makes references to blackness or *negro*, refers to an aspect that is innately setting back the Cuban race (See Appendix 2). Many conversations about interracial relationships still carry the pre-revolutionary idioms of "estas retrasando la raza [you are setting the race back]." This alludes to a loss of power with interracial relationships. In many cases, the Black aesthetic is seen as undesirable and to a certain extent a social deformity that people comment on with titles like "*negro colorado*," "*capirro*," "*negro azul*." These aspects of Blackness rely on visible markers like kinky hair, wide noses, big lips, or complexion that dictate beauty. Additionally, statements like "*mi negra*" can solely beloving terms or can be followed by incredibly racially fraught language. Blackness is a term that can be equally used as a weapon to oppress or a tool to uplift.

Blackness also became more of a derogatory term as the country became more racially mixed. In a country that highlights the image of a mixed race, the negative connotations of Blackness are used to describe who Cubans were not who they are. This created a safe space for racialized jokes to resurface, because people were "solo bromeando [just playing]" through asserting "*no soy racista* [I'm not racist]." This is problematic because pre-revolutionary sentiments are coded as not racist after the revolution, although the meaning was just as derogatory. Additionally, it fuels the notions of hierarchy that the revolution aimed to eradicate. This affirms a devaluing of Blackness and "Black" features in the Cuban aesthetic.

These racial and cultural complexities became clear to me during a visit to a friend's home. While visiting Vladimir[30] in Miramar, I spoke to his mother whom I met during my first trip to Cuba in 2013. His mother is a proud Cuban of Jamaican, Chinese, and European heritage. She is an *espiritista*, and proud to speak on her African heritage, and so was he. As we spoke, I was drawn to a picture of a red haired child in a small picture frame. I guess she could see my fascination with the image, and told me that it was a picture of Vladimir as a child. I was immediately confused, because Vladimir is a Cubano *trigueño* with dark hair. She went on to say that he hated when people addressed him as *jabao capirro*, so he committed to dyeing his hair jet black, straightening it with a Keratin treatment every few months, and feeling more comfortable with people addressing him as *trigueño*. After the immediate shock of seeing my friend's dramatic change, I could see that he bore the scars of the social conditioning that made him

[30] Pseudonym used to protect the identity of my informant.

uncomfortable with his Blackness, even if he was a proud Yoruba religious practitioner who spoke fondly of an African heritage.

Cuban racial categories are not as rigid as those in the US. Therefore, most people of African descent identified as "mestizo" or "mulatto." However, this sentiment of being "mulatto" or "mestizo" could also reflect internalized racism that privileges being racially mixed, instead of Black. According to Andrews, "a person of African ancestry in Latin America is to be 'brown' not black. 'Brownness' is a racial category born of race mixture, and as an intermediate social category between blackness and whiteness, as many observers have noted, it can be a means of escape from blackness" (Andrew, 57). It is because of these connotations that the term CDA arose as a necessary term to empower people in Cuba through an ideological understanding of what it meant to be Cuban with an African religious, cultural, and racial heritage.

The negative social connotations of blackness coupled with the state's inability to endorse Africanness across the island created a hostile environment for CDA all over the country. The revolution actively resisted an African consciousness and attempted to reduce Africanness to skin complexion and ignore heritage. It celebrated blackness, and, in doing so, endorsed an oppressive look at the self. This was an attempt to raise Cuban nationalism by ignoring racial marginalization, but still addressing skin complexion. The state had created a problem, it ignored Africanness and promoted the problematic aspects of blackness that the CDA attempted to escape from in the first place. CDA cannot celebrate their blackness and/or Africanness. They could not voice their African consciousness in post revolutionary Cuba without paying the social price of doing so, and they

did not want to be black Cubans who ignored the empowering aspects of their own identities. The revolution comes at the cost of people only accepting half or none of their identities[31].

Performing Knowledge of "Africa"

CDA celebrated an "African" heritage, which created a complex "African" consciousness. They understood themselves to be biologically rooted to Africa, as in the geographic location. They also connected to an imagined "Africa." This pride in an imagined location fostered a sense of "African-being-in-the-world," which refers to "non-Africans who never came in physical contact with Yoruba," but held a deep connection to "Africa" through religious ritual and oral traditions (Babalola Yai, 234, 237). Although "Africa" was a constructed place and identity, it allowed CDA to authentically build community in Cuba. "Africanness" provided a counter narrative to the previously perpetuated images of Blackness. Moreover, "rather than accept black identity as inferior to whiteness… Afrocentric thought have sought to counter negative portrayals of blackness with rediscovery and elevation" (Missouri, 9). CDA most closely connected to "Africa" through religion. Similar to other Africans in the diaspora "Africa is the matrix of the religion, and Yorubaland is universally acknowledged as the source and ultimate reference for authenticity, knowledge, authority, credibility, and

[31] Working within the state, in post-revolutionary Cuba, would affect CDA in different ways. Those that believed themselves to be Black and having African consciousness would have to lose both empowering parts of their identity. Additionally, Cubans who did not identify as Black but acknowledged their African consciousness would be pressured to enact upon half of their identity to continue being revolutionaries in Cuba. On the contrary, the only Cuban who would not be affected by the changes of the state would be those who were racially Black but did not claim an African consciousness. The complexities of Blackness and Africanness were highlighted during this time period, and only became more evident as time progressed.

legitimacy" (Babalola Yai, 240). CDA revered Africa as a place of religious and ethnic origins, and formed strong bonds through religious practices that shaped their individual identities. In addition to that, these religious understandings of the self have continued to manifest themselves in all aspects of social life. This idea of "Africa" has given way to notions of *afrocubanidad*, and spiritual citizenship to create an African consciousness.

Afrocubanidad emerged in the 1930s in Cuba as a "cultural movement of most visible expression, [which] challenged dominant conceptions of blacks' inferiority and the negative effects of racial mixing"(De La Fuente, 178). It acted as a site of subculture within the nationalized state. It exalted CDA art, music, religions, and culture. For example, Rumba and son were artistic modes that classified practitioners of afrocubanidad (Guillen, 7). These sounds "redefined distinction between 'us' and 'them', African and Cuban" (Moore, 112). They demonstrated their uniqueness through directly impacting the Cuban national sound by performing an African polyrhythmic music structure. CDA now had a distinctive sound that characterized their complex self-identification. Additionally, CDA religions like Santeria, Polo Monte, and Abakua connected Cubans to an African religious cosmology. According to Murrell, "Afro-religions show strong African connections and harbor African cultural memory; they are religions of the people, by and for the people; they are non traditional and creole faiths shaped by cultures; they are an integral part of the Caribbean's colonial legacy; and they continue to generate international interest and inspiration" (Murrell, 10). These religions were and continue to be the ways that CDA sustain their "cultural memory" of a place and history that does not begin on a ship through the middle passage. Their performed

history comes from a connection to a legacy of leaders, thinkers, and religious practitioners through ritual. Although the ideology of *afrocubanidad* spoke to a culture of celebrating African traditions, the post-revolutionary period deemed this ideology unnecessary. Being that Communist had in theory eradicated racial and class distinctions, the need for an *afrocubanidad* ideology seemed superfluous to the state. After the revolution, the Cuban state endorsed the notion of *Cubania,* which

> "has been defined in terms of the country's African heritage. Some believe this reflects the predominantly white exodus… a definition of Cuba as an Afro-Latin country precludes giving space to this wanting to proclaim a separate black identity. Unity and homogeneity demand that 'the Cuban racial universe and its complexity and how this is represented in cultural life not be expressed in the official discourse" (Ayorinde, 141).

Cubanía was a term used to consolidate all subcultures into a national Cuban identity. However, through the continued social marginalization, CDA still felt the need to maintain a strong grip on their CDA traditions. One of the most notable examples of CDA identity during this time was the preservation of CDA religions. During the time directly following the triumph of the revolution, religion was a threat to the newly liberated state. Religious people, in general, were considered counterrevolutionary and discriminated against. Therefore, CDA were marginalized along racial and religious lines. Their religious practices were persecuted by the state and the dominant Christian doctrines (Suarez Ramos). Similar to its origins in Cuba, Santeria "was a product of a needed sacred space that CDA created as a refuge in the storm of enslavement, Santeria was a way to find meaning, and a divine reality that could answer the contradictions and miseries of, a slave society and life's hopelessness among oppressed people's of African

descent" (Mason, 96). Although Mason speaks to Santeria's origins, the religious persecution continued into the twentieth century. Although not as violent, the state demonstrated its discomfort with the image of an CDA that was separate from the state through practice, religion, or self-identification. The complexity of CDA identity is grounded in a religious understanding of the self that branches into other, if not all, aspects of social life.

CDA have continued to base their cultural ideology on religious principles, which create a sense of spiritual citizenship within the Cuban state. Castor investigates spiritual citizenship in Trinidad & Tobago's diverse Orisha religion as an idea that is "performed, engaged, and negotiated. These identities, grounded in transnational spiritual networks ultimately inform local kinships and lineage and national citizenship" (Castor, 49-50). Spiritual citizenship directly seems to be subversive to individual state laws, but supportive of the revolution's original goals of inclusivity and equity. CDA enacted spiritual citizenship as a way to create the racial and cultural equity the revolution promised, but its religious methods to achieve such equality is against the state's desire to remain atheist. In the case of Cuba, lineage within the Afro-Atlantic religions is very important as it can root family's to as much as seven or eight generations of CDA religious practitioners. This need to preserve a religious identity against persecution created the spiritual citizenship that emanated in performance. Spiritual citizenship politicized religion and created community within a nation that did not attempt to account for intersectionalities of identities that were based in faith or religious doctrines. CDA looked to religion as a way to create solidarity amongst a

marginalized people through spiritual beliefs. Religion was not limited to worship, but instead powerful enough to threaten the state and empower a people through a religious community. These different ideologies surrounding CDA highlighted the omnipresence of an African consciousness that developed through religion and politics.

Embodying and Awakening Orisha on the Dance Floor

CDA embodied performance reflected aspects of a deep-rooted African consciousness. After the triumph of the revolution, CDA gained access to Casino and introduced aspects of themselves into the genre. Since their identity was deeply grounded in a religious and racial identity, they performed these ideologies in social circles in Cuba. The embodiment of religious and racial vestiges of the self became evident in the presence of Yoruba orisha choreography within Casino Salsa. Embodied knowledge allowed CDA to create community and understanding in places that were previously restricted to them. It was through embodied knowledge that the worshipper acted as a vessel of knowledge beyond their own lived experiences. People began to perform aspects of a cultural and religious history when the music calls upon the dancer. This knowledge privileged the performing body as a vessel of the dissemination of African heritage in secular and sacred spaces.

Yvonne Daniel explores the extent to which religious African consciousness manifests itself through the arts in sacred and secular practices. She asserts that embodied knowledge is within the

> "Expressive dancing bodies in the same space at the same time performing the same movements to the same rhythms. The dancing bodies accumulate spirit, display power, and enact as well as disseminate knowledge. Worshipping performers reenact what they have learned,

> what hey have been told, what they feel and what they imagine. They re-resent feelings, ideas, understandings, and knowledges" (Daniel, 59).

According to Daniel, the embodied knowledge within worship educates the body on new sensibilities within the Afro-Atlantic religions. The performing body is a tool to educate the self and others on an African lineage. Embodied knowledge put the physical body "on display as community instruction for social cohesion and cosmic balance" (Daniel, 265). The dancing body gave practitioners the most avenues to understand Africanness and Afro-religiousness within the self. The Dancing Body alone contained the following: embodied psychology, embodied physiology, embodied philosophy, and embodied dance. All of these knowledges lead to an African consciousness that is held within the body. For example, the embodied psychology and philosophy is the constructed "Africa" that is apparent in the diaspora. CDA have been able to use religion and performance to enact "African" traditions, rituals, and a critical consciousness surrounding it. Additionally, embodied physiology and dance demonstrate a deep understanding of how the body operates and performs. Within the African context, the body is an active tool for self-exploration through performance. In many ways, Daniel speaks to the recurring sentiments of "lo tengo en la sangre [I have it in my blood], "corre en mis venas [it runs in my veins]," "se siente [you feel it]" (Yandro, Aime, and Leandro, 2015). Yandro and Aime are siblings who dance for professional dance companies. Yandro went from being a national taekwondo contender after 17 years of professional training, and auditioned for the Conjunto Folklorico Nacional de Cuba. Without any professional training, he earned the position of being the company's

principle dancer in the company. Aime spoke about her admiration for his brother's work and dedication to achieve such an amazing goal. When asked about how he climbed the artistic social ladder so quickly, she responded "el siempre lo tenia, esta en su corazon, y baila su alma [he always had it within him, it was in his heart, and he danced his soul]" on stage (Aime, 2015). It was clear that the body performed what the soul already knew to be ones truest self.

CDA view dance as a "performance of ways of knowing in the Black community, negotiating, and creating culture, especially religious culture that were incorporated into the civil culture of Cuban society" (Otero, 113). Otero asserts that a religious identity aids the body in conveying social meaning. Embodied knowledge is more notably useful in religious spaces, but can also be seen in social settings that mark the body as performing aspects of African consciousness.

After the revolution, the social performance of Casino Salsa showcases Yoruba orisha influenced choreographies. CDA embedded Yoruba[32] movements into the performance of Casino Salsa to represent the religious movement vocabularies that practitioners had developed overtime within their religious contexts. I will explore the presence of Yoruba influenced gestures, choreography, and structure within the performance of Casino.

Casino Salsa is a social dance form that showcased the virtuosity of its dancers through their ability to fluidly and flawlessly execute multiple genres within a music set.

[32] Yoruba refers to the West African ethnic group that is located in modern day Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, and Togo (Murrell). It also references one of the largest and most influential religions in Cuba, Santeria.

After the revolution, Casino movement came to reflect the Yoruba orisha gestures, choreography, and performance structure. It is through Casino's popularization that CDA evoke the self in social performance. According to Barbara Glass, a prominent dance scholar of the African diaspora, African movement vocabularies are comprised generally of "angular bending of arms, legs, and torso; shoulder and hip movements; scuffing, stamping, and hopping steps; asymmetrical use of the body; and fluid motion… wide, solid stance, [which] flexes in the knees" (Glass, 16). Casino dancers clearly embody these aspects of African movements in mainstream social clubs and discotheques in contemporary Cuba. Dancers not only reflect African influenced movement vocabularies, but perform choreographic specificities that allude to Yoruba orishas. The incorporation of these movements into a mainstream dance like Casino enacts the fluidity of embodied knowledge to permeate traditionally secular spaces. CDA seem to, in many ways, perform their religious and racial selves through their incorporation of these sacred influenced movements in traditionally secular spaces. I explore the specifics of Glass' nine essential characteristics of African dance in the diaspora through gestures, choreography, and structure that reflect an African consciousness through embodied performance.

Figure 9: Cuban International Ad: "Salsa y Timba." Showcases the dancing in Callejon de Hamel.

CDA connected with spirit as an extension of the self, and modeled the Africanist aesthetic [33] in choreography that is characterized by the "orientation towards the Earth, improvisation, circle or line formation, importance of community, polyrhythms percussion, pantomime, emphasis on hands, and a competitive spirit (Glass, 21). These aspects of African diasporic movements are all seen in the post-revolutionary performance of Casino Salsa. Gestures in Santeria or Yoruba religion in Cuba are incredibly important tools in the embodiment of orisha in secular performance. In general, performance of Cuban folklore[34], performers are taught to "bailar la esencia de los orisha desde la cabeza a los pies, cada parte del cuerpo y corazón me tienen que indicar quien eres [dance the essence of the orisha from head to toe, every part of the body and heart much tell me who you are]" (Edicta, 2015). These aspects of folklorized performance of Yoruba orisha become part of the popularized repertoire of Yoruba

[33] Brenda Dixon Gottschild (15).
[34] Dance genre that is taught in the *espectaculo* curriculum in performing arts institutions. It trains dancers in Yoruba folklorized movement for stage performances mostly used to promote the tourist sector in Cuba (Yaimara, 2015).

orisha within Casino Salsa. As Glass points out, gestures are incredibly important to performing an Africanist aesthetic. In the case of Casino, the dance is significantly influenced by gesture in performance that indicates a specific orisha through pantomime, emphasis on the hands, and improvisation. I believe that the face, hands, and body evoke the personification of various spirits within the performance of Casino Salsa.

The face is the first most apparent aspect of Yoruba orisha within Casino Salsa. Women typically use facial expressions indicative of Ochun and Yemaya's personas on the dance floor. After researching the performance of Casino in La Casa de La Musica in Havana, I witnessed women exude the sensuality of Ochun and/or the strength and confidence of Yemaya through facial expressions. Ochun manifested herself in the flirtatious persona of women who showcased her alluring eyes, smirking lips, and sensual movements that enact her "[eroticism] as power" (Missouri, 50). Unlike Ochun, performers with a Yemaya expression would dance with more determination, power, pride, and dominance. Their chin was always elevated, eyes were wide open, and their expression consistently looked like they were preparing to compete with their male partners on the dance floor. Aside from the female orisha accentuation of facial expressions, men relied on the power of "something in the hand" (Glass, 22). Men more so used hand gestures as semiotic markers to differentiate Chango, Oggun, or Ochosi's movement. For example, due to Casino's open arm position form, men have the freedom to express their own individuality with their arms. These moments of improvisation highlighted Chango power through thunder strikes with open hand positions that extended from the ceiling to the ground.

Dancers emoting Oggun's[35] persona in the performance of Casino would typically dance with an open hand that would strike the floor with the shoulder as the point of initiation of movement. The facial and embodied gestures reflective of Yoruba orisha within social performances shed light on the power of gestured expression alone within choreography to evoke meaning.

Christopher Smith explores this phenomenon as "gesture language," which help those within a performance community have the tools to decipher the "range of dance characteristics and aesthetics implicit in images throughout performance" (Smith, 191). This alludes to the creation of dancing communities through a shared technique. According to Hamera, technique is more than virtuosity. It speaks to the sociality and influence of dance within certain groups to create community and solidarity. In the case of Cuba, these choreographic markers indicate a similar religious, class, or cultural background. Technique

> "makes the body communally readable and available…. It uses metaphysics and is, in turn, enchanted by it. If the former is, at its simplest level, denotative, making the body legible and communicable, then metaphysics, the latter, is another voice that offers a way of constituting a company community, of characterizing the transporting effects of legible bodies' beauty, and of grapping with the capriciousness of those bodies' finitude" (Hamera, 173).

The technique of many CDA in Cuban nightclubs creates a cultural community not limited to a physical place, more of a state of being. People connect to the ideologies of knowing that the body enacts during the social performance of Casino. People are able to read gestures in performance as having technical power. They hold value in the creation

[35] The orisha that represented "iron, hunting, and warfare" (Babatunde Lawal, 32).

of community in a social space without having to verbalize that solidarity. It is a community created through the choreographic techniques performed by the body.

Gestures reveal conscious or subconscious movement vocabularies of each individual that gave meaning to the dance. In this case, performance within the body of CDA is incredibly influenced by their religious identity. CDA constructed a genre that represented their complex identities through the manifestation of themselves within the rhythms that evoked the strength and power of orisha through facial and embodied expressions in Casino Salsa.

Cuban social life summoned the presence of Yoruba orisha in clubs through the individual choreographic characteristics that are performed on the dance floor. Each orisha moves in a unique way to highlight its individuality and varied physical prowess. Some of the main orisha that I saw being performed at Casa de La Musica were Ochun, Chango, and Yemaya. As I watched dancers interact and perform during the music breaks that occurred during live shows, the dancers would impeccably and fluidly transition from partnered work to improvised solos. It was during these moments of separation, that they could dance to the complexities of the polyrhythms of the music uninhibitedly (Daniel,192). I was always fascinated by the creativity and motive behind the movements themselves during these musical breaks. The men, in many cases, danced with Chango choreographic tendencies. The men were quick to cut the air with their rapid kicks, spins, and pelvic undulations throughout the performance. Similarly, Daniel notes that Chango performers dance with signature moves like the "kick that accompanies an arm gesture, which symbolizes his extraordinary potency. With this

gesture he brings that energy of lightening and thunder from the sky above into his genitals… Chango's dance that has leaps, tumbling, and kicks" (Daniel, 139). Although the movement was much smaller, given the social setting and crowed venue, the dynamic physicality that Chango's movement entails was present. Dancers would execute rapid and complex footwork. Then they would look at their partners and undulate their hips, and kick to the side as they struck the ground with thunder. This performance of ability and masculinity illustrated the general characteristics of Chango's movement within secular spaces.

The dancers who moved like Ochun were more sensual with movement. They danced slower, arched their backs as they turned around with their hips as the point of initiation of the movement, and embodied her flirtatious personality. They would look at their partners directly and not change their gaze even in movement that redirected their center of gravity. Dancers who personified Ochun within the performance of Casino turned slowly, with grounded movement, and a seductive stare. Yemaya on the other hand was incredibly competitive with her partner. During one of my interviews with a professional dancer who is *hija de Yemaya,* she stated that "para mi es una competencia de danza. Yo quiero bailar sensualmente pero con el poder de cualquier hombre [for me it's a competition within the dance. I want to dance in a sensual manner, but be just as powerful as any man I dance with]" (Yaimara, 2015). When I danced along side her one evening, I better understood her statement. She danced with rapid footwork to showcase her ability to match all the intricate sounds of the music, but also undulated her hips in a sensual manner. She evoked both aspects of Chango and Ochun within her performance

of Yemaya. Choreography influenced by Yoruba orisha within Casino Salsa, is similar to the Yoruba influences within Samba that showcase " the body as a vessel for the orixa" (Browning, 44). The body can be a tool used to emote a pride in an African heritage or African religious affiliation. It is through choreography that we can see the potential for the expression of an African consciousness within the performing body.

Figure 10: Screenshot from Los Van Van video "Me Mantengo". Dancers of Los Van Van showcase the mbodiment of Chango and Ochun with their facial expressions, clothing colors, and choreographic vocabularies in Casino. (Youtube)

Not only is the identity of Yoruba orisha evident in the performing body, it is also embedded in the structure of the dance itself. Casino provides the mode by which specific principles of African diasporic dance structure themselves in social performances. Casino provides a space for community due to its social nature, but CDA have introduced their own cultural understandings of community into the performance genre. For example, Casino is performed in lines and in circular form, which indicate a community. Additionally, Casino already follows the principles of tracing that appear in African diasporic dance through call and response. Casino's circular form is called

rueda, literally means wheel, is comprised of couples that hear *figuras*, or choreographic combinations, from the *rueda's* lead. The dancers would move through the circle exchanging partners, creating moments of improvisation, and executing complex choreographic sets (Balbuena, 52). Community was created through preparation and practice. People would meet in groups to work on new *figuras* after work in recreational community centers, and showcase them as a group.

CDA created community within the dance form structure as well as in the participant-viewer relationship. It is completely acceptable to cheer for dancers in *rueda* with words like "agua," "echa," "dale," or "anda." This cheering is characteristic of post-revolutionary performances of Casino that did not distance performers from audience members, and innately blurred the lines between who was performing and who was watching. Everyone who bore witness or participated in the dance became apart of the dance. The narrow view of the relationship between audience and performer was widened, as "the sight of dancing evoked a physical response in the viewer, whether the viewer was 'passive' observer or active participant; in dance, the body provided the vehicle for participatory, interpersonal connection via sharing of 'liminal' experiences" (Smith, 173). The nightclubs allowed for the active participation of all parties. Additionally, the nature of *rueda* operated through the principles of tracing (call and response). The guide of the *rueda* would call out a name of a *figura,* and dancers would respond by dancing the indicated movement or by repeating the *figura* to ensure everyone heard it. This communication within the performance of *rueda de Casino* played a major role in the community building that occurs in Casino after the revolution,

which reflected major aspects of African diasporic choreographies. The inclusion of Guaganco and Rumba into the Casino social canon enact a clear increase in an Africanist aesthetic within the genre.

African Consciousness in Casino

During my interviews in Cuba, I asked Cuban dancers of African descent if the presence of Yoruba orisha manifested itself in the performance of Casino. After the initial looks of confusion surrounding such a loaded question, almost all of my interlocutors shrugged and stated "pues esta en nuestra sangre [it is in our blood]" or "se siente [you feel it]" with a smile on their face. It was through these insightful conversations I learned that race and religion in Cuba are tied in a way that acknowledged intersectinalities of identity that is rarely explored in the United States. Many understand the self as linked to their race and religion, which was clear when they spoke about how their Yoruba orisha manifests his/herself in their performance. This understanding of a complex CDA self created an African consciousness that manifested itself in the gestures, choreography, and structure of Casino performance in post-revolutionary Cuba. Although I primarily focused on dancers who I knew considered themselves to be active within the Yoruba religion, they provided me with keen insight into how they perform the self in all aspects of their lived experiences. Like many

> "diaspora dancers have challenged the dominance and tyranny that they have experienced through the subterfuge of their dancing bodies, and they are convinced that the transcendence they experience within the elaboration of parading, historical, national, combat, sacred, folkloric, popular, or concert dance was and is a vehicle for creative and contagious well-being… they are convinced of such potential within dance practices and their dancing lifestyles prove it" (Daniel, 195).

Although Casino was a popularized dance genre, many of the performances of CDA performers enacted an African consciousness that reflected their lived experiences on the island. CDA were still plagued by many of the discriminatory practices created by centuries of oppression. However, it was through the constant celebration of an African identity that occured in daily-lived experiences that fueled the manifestation of Yoruba orisha within the performance of Casino. Yoruba orisha appeared in traditionally sacred spaces not to divine the secular, but as a way to perform aspects of the religious and racially informed self. It was through an appreciation of "Africa" that dancers learn to incorporate these movement vocabularies into the body, and perform them *cuando lo sienten,* when they feel it. This "feeling" arises from an understanding of a complex history, a desire to maintain a culture, and a need to continue a legacy that lies within the self.

LA JUVENTUD TA' EN CANDELA:

CONTEMPORARY YOUTH CULTURE INFLUENCES CASINO

During my second trip to Cuba in 2015, I had the opportunity to live with the Rojas family for two and a half months. I had developed a relationship with them two years prior, and was eager to see them again. Once I got to Cuba, my host brother Dariel greeted me with a "what's up." He looked quite different from the last time I had seen him, for one, he was more mature and had started a family. Also, he seemed much more concerned with his style than he was in 2013. He wore sunglasses that resembled Ray Bans, a black t-shirt with a naked woman on it with the words "Hustler" inscribed across the top, and harem style denim jeans.

After catching up, he updated me on the changing music scene. Dariel was a fan of Cuban reggaetón and his style reflected that completely. He could not stop talking about Chacal y Yakarta, Los 4, and Los Desiguales, all reggaetón groups in Cuba. Although he took the time to explain so many of the changes to me, the daily sounds I heard while I walking through Pogoloti , Marianao showed me just how much the music scene had shifted in such a short amount of time. It reflected the varied musical interests of the residents. The music ranged from hip hop, to rumba, to timba, to reggaetón, to the Yoruba sounds during *toques*[36]. I wondered how and why the Cuban people had incorporated world music into their repertoire. After about three weeks of being in Cuba during my 2015 trip, Dariel invited me to Marco's home to get the weekly *paquete*.

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[36] Religious ceremonial celebrations with music and dance.

The *paquete* is a set of downloaded files that go onto a client's *memoria,* flashdrive. The *memoria* becomes the *paquete* once about 6GB of data are transferred to the device. These *paquetes* are updated on a weekly basis, and house an archive of what has happened in popular culture around the world. Predominantly, these *paquetes* include magazines and newspaper articles PDFs, music and political sound bites in MP3s, and show snippets and movie trailer in MP4 files from the United States, Cuba, Canada, and Latin America. These *paquetes* can be purchased in any of the Havana municipalities; where someone is designated with the job of disseminating forms of popular culture on a *memoria*. The entire *paquete* costs 2 CUC (48 MN) to buy, however, anyone can buy individual files with Moneda National.

When I first met Marco[37] in 2013, he explained the process of buying files to me in great detail. I could buy a movie for 25 pesos (MN); show series for 30 pesos (MN), and music videos for 10 pesos (MN). Before the 1980s, this occupation was once illegal as it threatened the status of the Cuban state, by bringing global information that presented and alternative to what the Cuban state preferred to promote. Since the state controlled all media outlets, people with Marco's job acted as gatekeepers to the global popular culture. During my first trip to Marco's home I bought an anti-virus program, the full season of the American sitcom How I Met Your Mother, the movie John Wick, the Mexican telenovela series Señor del Cielo, and the entire Cuban Reggeaton band's Los 4 album for less than 5 dollars. He had access to so many resources that fueled the Cuban youth's investment in American popular culture. He helped Cubans gain access

[37] Pseudonym used to protect the identity of my informant.

to the global arena, which they had no direct connection to. I do not believe that his popularity in Pogoliti was an accident. The municipality is predominantly comprised of CDA, and therefore had very limited access to people in other countries who could directly send them these files. Marco's role, in many ways, filled the gap between those who had access and those who did not.

Two years after my initial introduction to Marco in 2013, I returned to Pogoloti to find people anxiously waiting for him to return from biking, so they could buy Rihanna's *Bitch Better Have My Money* music video from him. People were eager to know why her video had been censored, and wanted to see how she would cinematically perform the song they sang to and heard all too often. It was clear to me that they were not only investing money to see these videos, but they wanted to keep up with the global community's musical tastes and advances. Not only were people incredibly excited to participate in the conversations surrounding popular artists like Rihanna, but they were also equally interested and intrigued by Mexican drug culture found in Señor de los Cielos. Entire conversations would revolve around the idea of being *al tanto* ("in the know") on certain popular culture references. I saw that the Cuban youth of African descent had acquired a taste for what had global appeal outside the island.

In addition to the more contemporary files within the *paquete*, sometimes there were surprises within the file folders that made people *ponerse en candela,* to get excited about something that sounds *hot* or *on fire*. A few weeks after I saw the excitement build up from the release of Rihanna's latest music video, Dariel sifted through the files in the *paquete* and found one entitled "Reggaetón PR". Once he clicked a random song

in the folder, he proceeded to scream. He called in my host sister Yisel into the living room, and they both sang along to Tego Calderon's first Spanish reggaetón single entitled "El Abayarde" which was released in 2002. They turned up the music. The louder it got more people in the building began to sing along. This was a song "*que nos tenia como locos en ese entonces* [that had us going crazy back then]" (Dariel, 2015). Considering that Dariel is 19 years old and Yisel is 30, it was clear that this song demonstrated the appeal of reggaetón across generational lines. During that time period, all of the youth consumed the same song and the same message, of Afro-Latino pride in the Caribbean. The *paquete* reflected The Cuban youth's past, present, and future musical tastes. It created a discourse surrounding global music, and how to incorporate the young Cuban culture within a transnational frame.

In contemporary Cuba, race and class mark privilege. The new economic system reinstated similar modes of discrimination as those of pre-revolutionary Cuba. People who are perceived as *Cubanos Blancos* were more likely to have connections to someone in the United States that could send remittances on the island. This, in turn, created a Cuba divided by class. During this time, intersectionalities of identity become incredibly apparent. CDA become marginalized by their race and class status, because many lacked connections to people in the United States that had acquired a significant amount of wealth within that time. Because of Cuba's contemporary engagement in foreign markets, the state could no longer control the upward social and economic mobility. They are now work within the global arena that reinforces the same situations on the Black community. After the triumph of the revolution, religious practices were

not perceived as overtly counterrevolutionary. The marginalization of people with a conscious Black identity through religious affiliation, was replaced by a new racial and class marginalization of the Black community.

In this chapter, I investigate the ways that Casino Salsa's social repertoire became greatly influenced by the power of the Cuban youth of African descent's voice after 1990. The socio-political tensions of the pre and post -revolutionary Cuba climaxed in the 1990s as the fissures of the Communist party could no longer be concealed from the view of the *pueblo*. Cuban youth felt the strong impact of popular music like hip hop and reggaetón. These genres validated the experiences of people on the margins, which motivated Cuban youths of African descent to create genres like Cuban Hip Hop, Timba, and Cubatón. These genres empowered people who identified as poor and black. I argue that the Cuban youth born after the Special Period became enthralled with new technology and transnational artistic expression that provided them with the tools to participate in the larger global community. This can be seen in their inclusion of hip hop breaking, timba tembleques, and reggaetón *perreo* and grinding within the Casino Salsa repertoire. People directly reacted to the constant invalidation of their identities. These more popular sounds and dance repertoires were transferred into the performance of Casino, making it accessible to the youth that embodied the change they wished for the state. These new ideas demonstrated the global consciousness of Cubans who experienced a transnational embodied citizenship[38] in Cuba through their affiliation with hip hop, reggaetón, and timba. These ideologies help situate Cuban youth culture within

[38] Theory provided by Thomas (2011).

a global musical culture, as well as demonstrate their deep rooted pride in being Cuban, aside from their contentions with the Cuban state.

Resurgence of Pre-Revolutionary Social Relationships in Dance

The fall of the Soviet Bloc created the largest economic depression Cuba had experienced. The "commercial relations with the former Soviet Union declined by more than 90 percent," and the "the country lost approximately 80 percent of its imports, 80 percent of its exports… food and medicine imports stopped or severely slowed" (Perez, 381-387). This tragic time period, better known as The Special Period in Times of Peace, brought widespread scarcity and malnutrition. One of my teachers Maria Nela spoke about the sugar water that teachers would prepare for children close to passing out due from hunger heat exhaustion. Another teacher of mine, Eva[39], stated that she and her family would "preparar una esponja con sazón y no la comíamos como filete [prepare and season a household sponge, and pretend it was a five star filet]" Cubans were

> "raising pigs in bathtubs, making omelets without eggs and pizzas with melted condoms, getting married for the state-allocated free case of beer, and other epic tales of survival, seldom void of black humor, form of the lore of the time." (Hernandez-Reguant, 1-2).

These moments of mental escape, pressured the government officials to focus on rebuilding the tourist sector to bring in significant revenue to save Cuba from the worst depression in the country's history. In a news conference in 1993, Fidel Castro announced: "I believe that there are enough millions of healthy tourists in the world for us to be able to develop the tourism industry in our country without corrupting or ruining

[39] Pseudonym used to protect the identity of my informant.

ourselves" (Castro, 1993). In addition to the tourist market, the legalization of the dollar reinforced pre-revolutionary racial and class dynamics in contemporary Cuba.

The legalization of the dollar created increased national prosperity, but also created the catalyst for more overtly problematic social relationships. In many ways, certain Cubans were unable to partake in the new economy. This created new social hierarchies within the state that were not based on national merit and devotion to the revolution. Because a majority of the Cubans who fled to the United States were white, wealthy, and educated, whites back in Cuba were those who received the most of remittances causing further and more apparent racial tensions (Kaufman Purcell & Rothkopt, 58). *Cubanos Blancos* also "benefited in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, from the racially biased hiring preferences of the tourism industry" (Chomsky, 136). They were not only directly connected to the dollar economy through remittances but could access through tips in CUC obtained from working at hotels and restaurants. CDA, excluded from participation in the tourist market, turned to illicit ways of obtaining money. It was common to see a Cuban of African descent take on the role of *jinetero*, a Cuban hustler servicing the tourist economy. Several times, Cubans warned me about the *jineteros* who stand initiated relationships with tourists in the hope of getting money to sustain their families. It was easy to spot Cuban *jineteros* at clubs because they danced to appeal the tourist gaze. Many dance on the one count and not the two count, as a way to dance LA style or Newyorikan style Salsa, to entice tourists to dance with them. The

jineteras on the other hand were more directly connected to prostitution.[40] With time, *jineterismo* has become a way for CAD, specifically *Cubanos Negros* to make a living and gain some agency over their finances that would have otherwise left them in indigence.

In short, the lack of opportunities for CAD in seemingly egalitarian society supposedly void of racial prejudices had clearly been proven wrong in the 1990s. The political and economic rupture of the 1990s thus facilitated a debate about the efficacy of the revolution, and how to create the change everyone wanted. The transnational arts provided CAD with the tools to combat the state through socio-politically conscious music that affected inevitable affected Casino Salsa performances.

Rising from *La Calle*

During the 1990's the Special Period brought devastation to the entire country, but CDA were disproportionately more oppressed compared to their white counterparts due to rapid changes of the state. CDA were now highly aware of their disenfranchisement with the introduction of remittances into the Cuban government during the Clinton administration. Cubans that remained connected to family members who were political exiles received more money than those that did not (Salazar-Carrillo & Nodarse-Leon, 62, 102). Since mostly wealthy *Cubanos Blancos* comprised the first and second largest waves of migration to the US, they benefitted from the

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[40] *Jineteras* could be either subtle about her advances or incredibly direct. In some cases *jineteras* were described as women who sat at a touristic bar reading a book in the middle of the day hoping to start conversations with tourists. Some on the other hand more overtly projected their sexuality at clubs by dancing closer to the tourists to gain their attention. In a more recent phenomenon, *jineteras* have come to work for *chulos,* pimps, that are in many cases their husbands.

institutionalized benefits of the US and had decades to acquire wealth in the US. The 1990s marked the stark difference between the relatively egalitarian standards of living that the USSR helped create, and the contemporary creation of social status through incoming remittances from the United States. For example, my Spanish teacher in Cuba recounted the pre- Special Period era as one where "casi todos eramos iguales, era una etapa donde todos los ninos tenian las mismas mochilas,uniformes, carpetas, zapatos [we were all basically equal, the only era where all the children had the same backpack, the same uniform, the same folders, and the same shoes]" (Maria Nella, 2013). People appeared to be living in a relatively classless nation. However, the legalization of the US dollar and remittances into the Cuban economy created clear division between those who could afford other commodities than the ones the state provided to the general population.

Cuba's drastic economic decline in 1990 changed Fidel Castro's rhetoric about tourism during the Special Period. He became more willing to work on creating and opening an international tourist market, to help the Cuban people escape the terrible effects of the economic shift since the fall of the USSR. Fidel Castro stated that

> "At a certain point we reached the conclusion that it was a resource that needed to be exploited. This happened before the collapse of the socialist bloc. Every country must live off its natural resources. Despite the significance to our economy of the socialist bloc's cooperation, our country, not having large energy resources, needed to take advantage of our other assets -- the sea, sun, pure air, and beauty of our land as a way of developing wealth and wellbeing for the country. However, tourism was not particularly developed. ..Perhaps it would have been better to have begun a littler earlier. Earlier, we had already built hotels for international tourism" (Castro 1993).

Many of the CDA who did work in the tourist market were professional dancers like my host sister Yaimara. She performed for tourist hotels in Santiago de Cuba, Villa Clara, and Varadero. These performances were aimed towards the European and Canadian audiences. Although she was able to enter these spaces as a professional, many CDA did not share that experience. In many cases she was the only *Cubana Negra* performer in a sea of *trigueñas*, *mulatas,* or *blancas*. She represented the Cubana that was slender, strong, tall, *con cara fina* (within refined facial features), and dark skin. She represented both the beautiful aspects of *Cubanas Negras* that tourists wanted to see, and the Cuban aesthetics of beauty. She was chosen to represent the new image of Cuban woman's appeal on the global stage.

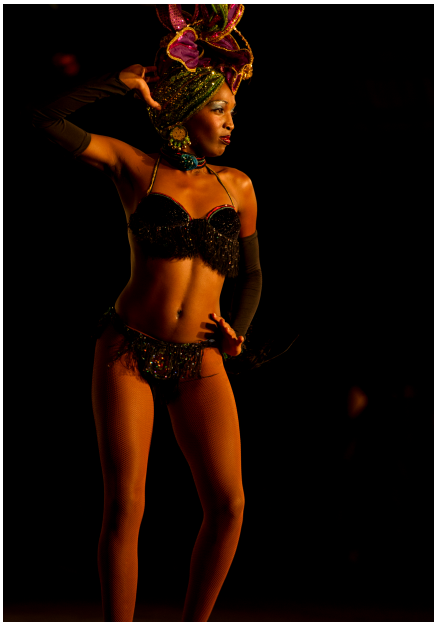

Figure 11: Photo of Yaimara Performing at a Hotel in Varadero in 2013. By Author.

The new focus on tourist markets allowed for the first major interaction with tourist since the 1960s. CDA were limited to the jobs they previously held, due to racial

biases. These jobs only paid 10-30 MN a month compared to their white counterparts who were getting upwards of 40-50 CUC a month. In many cases, CDA attempted to rectify this economic difference by engaging in pre-revolutionary means of attaining money, which were increased with the touristic focus of the state. Alejandro De La Fuente explains the role of the Black community in the Special Period with great detail. He writes that CDA resorted to illicit activity to make up for their inability to participate in the dollar economy. People participated in

> "Prostitution to trafficking in the black market, in order to access the indispensable hard currency. There is a widespread consensus that a large proportion of the so-called "jineteras" are black or mulatto… Black participation in prostitution is explained not only by their disadvantageous position in the current situation, but also by the tourists' own racialized notions of sexuality and pleasure. According to these notions, black sexuality is more appealing precisely because of the racial inferiority of black women and the unrestrained "primitiveness" of their sexual instincts, which makes them perfect sexual objects. Yet these very images, which associate blackness with unrestricted commercial sex, might construct [them] as "black" women who would not be considered 'Afro-Cuban' in other social relations." (De la Fuente 83-84).

We begin to see the limited and stereotypical images of Blackness become reaffirmed in the modern relationships between tourists and locals. CDA knew that creating caricatured images of the self were more profitable than working long days at a job that paid the minimum to survive. In many ways, the dual currency system created an "economic apartheid", according to Mazzei. Cuba was split economically, but those economic differences were dictated by racial discrimination from previous generations.

De La Fuente describes the social racism that was not eliminated when the state attempted to get rid the country of institutionalized racism all together. CDA were still

disproportionately allowed almost exclusively into blue collar sectors, and ostracized from holding positions in white collar occupations. Many CDA worked in hotels they could not enter, enrolled in schools with very few people that looked like them, and were practically absent from roles in Cuban national television all together (De La Fuente & Moore). Cuban youths of African descent became incredibly discontent with their lack of representation and financial stability. In many ways, "youths had become increasingly disenchanted with the Revolution and frustrated by the system in which they were living. While tourism provided substantial national income, it also exposed youths much more to *extranjero* (foreigners), their cultures, styles, ideals and the privileges that were being allotted to them" (Dixon-Roman & Gomez, 368). Many young people would go to the *malecon* (sea wall) and begin conversations with tourists about music, predominantly hip hop. Of course, many of these interactions came with the police asking to see their *carnet* (identification card) to ensure they were not being a nuisance to the tourists (Fernandez). This happened to a number of my friends who talked tourists about Tupac and Biggie in the 2000s. During the 1990s the voice of the tourist seemed to trump the voices of the Cuban *pueblo*, because the Cuban economic state rested on the success of the tourist market. However, this same idea reinforced pre-revolutionary imperial rule between Cuban and the United States' in the modern era. During this time, the youth seem to look to the consumption and production of music as ways to voice their political and economic concerns, and to escape their oppressive situations in general. In many ways, they seemed to feel the lack of representation that the revolution aimed to get rid of. The Black community sought to place their oppression at the forefront of the

concerns of the Cuban state during Special Period. Due to the increase in focus on tourism, the marginalized *pueblo* could no longer follow the communist party in an absolute manner. The very basis of economic equity was starring them in the face, holding them to the margins, and attempting to silence their concerns.

Bringin' It: Rise of Hip Hop Culture

Hip Hop's popularity in Cuba is largely due to its historic, political, and social role of speaking for the underrepresented. It connected the Cuban Black community to the Black experience in the diaspora. More importantly hip hop became a way to disseminate knowledge across class, racial, and political lines, and to bring attention to a clear injustice felt by CDA. Hip Hop arose "as a spontaneous form of cultural expression practiced by Afro-American, Puerto Rican, and Afro-Caribbean youth in marginal neighborhoods of New York" (Tickner, 122). Hip hop originally spoke to the experiences of African Americans, but it has had transnational popularity because of its ability to transcend and speak to the Black experience around the globe. From its origins in the United States, hip hop has become an example of "sonic Afro-Modernity" or "the complex interfacing of modern black culture and sound technologies… that have affected production, consumption, and dissemination of black popular music… due to the increasing globality of black musical practice" (Weheliye, 99-100). Saunders extends these ideas to the context of the Black community when he says "hip hop serves as a cultural conduit for exchanging ideas, memories, local histories, and strategies with Afro-descendent population in various American contexts" (Saunders, 9). Hip hop creates solidarity in communities that were not meant to create a collective group

mentality separate from the nationalist dialogue, specifically in Cuba. It exposed the CDA to the problems of disenfranchisement that are deliberately omitted from newspaper articles, television sets, and radio stories. Furthermore, they could see themselves reflected in the words, music, and appearance of hip hop performers from around the globe. The "Cuban youth felt that the artists looked like them, moved like them, and sounded like them. After a while, Cuban youths wanted to make their own contributions to hip hop culture and began to study hip hop intently in order to start creating their own distinct version" (Saunders, 89).

Figure 12: Photo of Graffiti in La Habana Vieja. Photo by Author.

During the Special Period, CDA used hip hop to ground their goal and aesthetic of change for Cuba. It was clear that "Cuban youths of African descent were fascinated by the images of hip hop that they had been receiving since the late 1970s, and actively requested recordings of hip hop music videos and tapes from foreign visitors" (Saunders, 89). The youth sought out these opportunities as a way to acquire knowledge and tools to better make a political statement to the Cuban state and also empower the general Cuban population. There was a clear desire to decode, analyze, and use these lyrics as the

foundation for a new Cuban sound: one that would carry the same themes as hip hop. According to Baker,

> "hip hop in Havana has transnational origins, of course, but one of the most distinctive features of the Havana scene, in comparison with other regions of the Hip Hop Nation, is the degree to which this transnational dimension has persisted: performances to foreigners, for foreigners, or by foreigners have marked key moments in the development of Cuban hip hop. As Havana became a spiritual home for political hip hoppers from around the world, the scene's boom years were distinctively international in flavor" (Baker, 247-8).

Young CDA held tight to hip hop's political principles, but changed its sound to better reflect the interests and the musical history of their own people. Hip Hop gave the Black community the power to make decisions that were countercultural nature. This is reinforced in Saunders article entitled *Black Thoughts, Black Activism* in which she sees hip hop in Cuba as a prime example of the "appropriation, replication, and reconfiguration of globalized art to express local histories" (Saunders, 2012). The role of Cuban rappers has been to "expose the gap between official discourses and lived experience: broadly speaking, this is acceptable as long as the gap is being criticized, rather than the discourses" (Baker, 46). In Cuba, hip hop, rappers, and listeners have cultivated a culture of critical thinking within the music. CDA have come to better understand the flawed system they are in and in many ways they "criticize the political leaders for ignoring questions of race in Cuban society by declaring the eradication of racism" (Fernandez, 584). They have been vocal about keeping the government accountable for the failed fulfillment of promises made to strengthen the revolution in the 1960s. The lack of focus on such promises on the direct needs of the Black community showcase the falseness of the communist political rhetoric reminiscent of

Brazil's racial democracy and Mexico's pride in *mestizaje*. The claim that racism has been eradicated through institutional equality is proven false when artists displayed their agency by directly speaking against these false notions. The explicit lyrical stance against the Cuban national dominant racial and economic discourses through "hip hop terrified the Cuban state" (Saunders, 81-83). Furthermore, "Cuban underground hip hop music (CUHHM) artists employed hip hop as a tool to negotiate their difficult daily realities" (Saunders, 81-83). These aspects of a complex Black identity permeated through class and education levels as university students were beginning to endorse and listen to hip hop music with a clear political message against the state (Baker, 25). Hip Hop helped give Cubans of African the tools to make countercultural political commentary within their own music.

The creation of CUHHM allowed Cubans to discuss four key ideas that characterized lyrics and sonic qualities of the Black community. Cuban CUHHM artists of African descent walked the line between activists and musicians in their highly political music. They not only reflected "Black identity politics, lyrics, clothing, music, dance, videos, and other visual media," but also disseminated "knowledge-practices and ideological production in the language used by activists… the CUHHM is the only critical arts scene in which they have heard the term 'activist' used to describe their work" (Saunders, 126). In many ways, rappers created the bridge between politics, race, and economy in an accessible way through their music. Rappers addressed four themes that characterized the Black experience as "revolution/ revolutionary, activism/ activists, poverty/marginalization, and underground/ commercial" (Saunders, 167). CUHHM

artists sought to create a consciousness within the community to ask more of their political system, which was responsible for their long history of oppression. The political nature of the musicality and lyrics in CUHHM reflected the Cuban need to voice grievances in a clear way to both the public and the public officials. Additionally, CDA used Hip Hop performances to freely express what they sought in an ideal Cuban society, and in many cases explicitly described its contradictions.

CDA performed hip hop culture through their appearance, their language, their social knowledge, and their dancing bodies. The hip hop culture in Cuba created a distinctive physical and social conscious divide within the Cuban population. Not only did Cuban rappers create a culture around their appearance and their music, but their fans also demonstrated their support for critically conscious music and the hip hop culture as a whole. As stated by Fernandez, "Cuban rap audiences use their clothing, and their adoption of American slang such as 'ain't' and 'muthafuka; as a way of distinguishing themselves as a group, and of highlighting their identity as young, black Cubans" (Fernandez, 600). Not only did this cultural intersection between Cuban of African descent and African American culture explore a shared appreciation of hip hop, it also demonstrated a shared Black experience displayed through cultural signifiers of language and appearance. Because hip hop arrived on the island via the cultural and tourist industry, it was not consistent. "However, television programs such as *Soul Train* and numerous US radio stations, which Cubans heard through makeshift antennas, were received throughout the country" (Tickner, 129). Programs that promoted hip hop dance were hot commodities for the Cuban youth. This appreciation of hip hop culture became

characteristic of Cuba youth culture in the 1990s, which evolved into the creation of breakdancing crews in central Havana as avenues for "Afro-Americans and Latinos to practice non-violent forms of competition and confrontation. Hip hop's corporeal symbolism, which consisted of demonstrating the dancer's physical prowess, became an integral part of street rhetoric during this period" (Banes, 14). These aspects of breakdancing were clearly seen in the *zonas calientes* of Havana like Calle Hueso and Pogoloti. Although the breakdancing was very clearly seen on the street, it was brought into Casino Salsa social spaces during improvisational settings.

Hip Hop presents itself in contemporary performances of Casino Salsa during the *despelote (*solo improvisational sections of the music) that allowed for the individual technique of the dancers to embody their version of the music through dance. In the case of Casino, I observed hip hop footwork make its way into the social dance spaces. Casiner@s[41] drop to the floor and kick out with their hand and foot in opposition to one another, simulating a crab walk or a tricep dip and kick. In addition to footwork, dancers have incorporated arm isolations known as popping and locking into their repertoire. They have moved from *tembleques*[42] and undulations of the torso and shoulders to the intricate articulation of arms and fingers to create sharp staccato movements found in the rapid popping and sharp locking sequences. Although hip hop was not officially part of the Casino *figuras*, it did infiltrate the *despelote*[43] of couples on the dance floor. They articulated their vast mastery of foreign techniques without having the pressure of

[41] A gender inclusive term for both Casinero and Casinera dancers.
[42] Rapid and small ticking of the upper body, mostly focused on the shoulders.
[43] Decoupling during social dance, which allows for both the lead and follow to improvise.

matching and complementing another person. Instead, true to hip hop fashion; dancers in couple form separated to compete for the attention of the viewers around them. This clear competitive edge between two people on the dance floor has characteristic of the legacy that hip hop has left on the Cuban people.

Hip hop provided the template by which CDA gained the tools to counter the political rhetoric fueled by the state in the 1990s. Although "the hip hop scene has [indisputably] declined from its peak around 2000," it created the foundation for subversive artistry in the Cuban youth culture (Baker, 354). Cuban youth gained a sense of empowerment and validation through the cultural consciousness that hip hop provided them with. I believe that hip hop's mainstream appeal was replaced by the wave of Puerto Rican Reggaetón that increased in popularity. Hip hop has become characterized as a genre that overtly critique the Cuban political system, with members like Roberto Zurbano spearheading the movement to maintain hip hop's countercultural identity. Reggaetón on the other hand spoke about similar racial and class struggles in a language people could understand with a lighthearted tone. It was accessible to the general population, and the overall upbeat music scheme made it easy to promote the social atmosphere of *la gozadera* (having a good time, or partying).

Although Cubans showed an interest in global music genres like hip hop and reggaetón in the 1990s, timba was one of the first Cuban artistic genres to be impacted by this artistic transnationalism.

Dándole Sazón: Timba Changes Salsa Narrative

Timba arose out of the hip hop influences that directly affected youth of African descent in the 1990s. Timba[44] had been understood as "the most important phenomenon of the 1990s and the first Cuban music of international popularity and importance since the 1950s" due to its unique sonic and lyrical qualities (Acosta, 9). It reflected hip hop's countercultural qualities, and differentiated it from the international narrative of a commercialized Salsa. Cubans were interested in creating a signature Cuban sound that would not be regarded as an appropriated commercial international phenomenon of *salsa*. According to Perna, "timba, in fact showed remarkable parallels with African-American hip hop. It is symbolically and economically related to street-life; it commented on slang, sex, money and life in the *barrio"* (Perna, 2). Timba transformed the themes within hip hop and used them to create a Cuban discourse on the social injustices that were largely based along racial lines. In many ways, the revolutionary Salsa sound lost its powerful popularity amongst the general population due to its commercialization and unacknowledged influence on the *Newyorican salsa* that swept the international music markets in the 1970s. Timba reflected the political grievances of the Cuban youth through a unique Cuban sound. After the 1980s "*salsa [was]* basically known as a commercial label for Cuban music played by non-Cuban musicians. I interpret timba as an attempt by Cuban musicians to distinguish themselves from the international Salsa scene" which had appropriated their original *salsa cubana* sound

[44] Timba originated as solely a music genre. However, after it developed a specific stylistic quality in social dance, it was regarded as a choreographic style not necessarily a dance genre that could standalone. It was a sound that could culminate all of the Cuban choreographic repertoires (Perna).

(Froelicher). The reason timba replaced *salsa cubana* was because the Cuban people did not want to associate with the commercialized image of Salsa that Newyoricans identified so closely with. Timba was sonically and lyrically transcultural as it incorporated diasporic sounds into the music in order to build that reflected the tastes of the Cuban people.

Timba's unique sound was a compilation of genres in Cuban and African American music that spoke to the Black experience. For example, timba was directly influenced by "rap with whole sections spoken in Hip hop style rather than sung in the way of the traditional Cuban sonero… [it] also had characteristics from rumba, and the black American R&B, especially in the phrasing and adornments that bend and play in between written notes" (Vaughan, 28). Unlike the salsa of the 1960s, timba did not rely on the performance of orchestras and big bands. It instead, relied on a small band, a lead singer, and the collaboration of back up singers in live performances and technologically generated music (Lopez Cano, 27). It included moments of improvisation on behalf of the musicians or singers. The structure of timba was vastly different from that of salsa, but it still paid homage to the original *salsa cubana* sound. For example, live timba performances could be separated into three distinct sections.

> 1) La Salsa, which is of moderate tempo and performed by a soloist; 2) el montuno, which is a refrain that is introduced in call-and response pattern as the temp markedly increases; 3) then los pedales, which features a hip hop/ R&B- like backbeat and strong movement in the bass guitar as the tempo recedes and the soloist talks rhythmically, introducing another refrain" (Vaughan, 25).

The structure of timba musical live performances reflected the influences of African American hip hop, and the lyrical structure paralleled the same narrative as well.

> "Los diseños melodicos y los patrones ritmicos del rapeado en la timba poseen un estilo muy propio. …Las letras echan mano de un lenguaje barriobajero y "vulgar", picaroy repleto de dobles sentidos. En ocasiones los textos son sumamente simples. En otras bay destellos de ocurrencia y humor muy cubano [the melodic design and rhythmic patterns of rapping during timba possessed a unique style… the lyrics alluded to a 'street' culture and a vulgar language with double meaning. On occasions the lyrics were simplistic and straight-forward, and other times timba expressed Cuban humor]" (Lopez Cano, 30).

Bands like Charanga Habanera and El Clan or artists like Adalberto Alvarez created songs that spoke to the notion of Cuban *jodederas* (joking way of being) within their lyrics. They spoke about the complex relationship between CDA and the political state within the music (Moore). One of Charanga Habanera's most famous song, "La temba," which was about an equivalent of the "cougar" in contemporary American popular culture. La temba was a older foreign woman that would allow CDA to obtain the materialistic goods that they could not afford on their own. La Charanga Habanera critique the effects of modern tourism on the Black community throughout his comedic lyricism. The timba lyrics are incredibly telling about new mode of seeking power as CDA within a communist system fraught with emerging issues of economic, social, and racial marginalization in the 1990s.

Casino became the popularly known as the dance style connected to timba in social circles, which directly accounted for a shift in youth cultural interests. Timba

> "es un tipo de musica bailable cubana que por medio de determinados mecanismos semioticos y cognitivos, gestiona, reorganiza, construye y semiotiza la agresividad que los jovenes cubanos padecen a causa de sus precarias condiciones socieconomicas [is a type of Cuban dance music which through semiotic gestures, reorganizes, and constructs the aggressiveness that the Cuban youth perform due to their precarious socioeconomic conditions]" (Lopez Cano, 24).

Timba politicized the *salsa cubana* movements of the past, and activated it as a strong political countercultural discourse through popular social dance. Timba articulated "a rejection on the part of younger Cubans of socialist rhetoric; its repertoire embraces sensuality, hedonism, and materialism" (Moore, 133). The youth enacted the social changes they wanted to see in Cuba on a small scale within social dance clubs. According to Balbuena, timba performances were "characterized by the execution of sensual, sometimes exotic movements" (Balbuena, 89). "It is done with arms in the air, bent, hands open… At the same time the hips, waist, and torso are rotated" (Balbuena, 89). Timba entailed the aggressive movements in the dancing body like rapid undulations, grounded movement, and sensual dancing. In many ways, the "repertoire represented a liberation of the body" from the social constraints that the communist state created (Moore, 134). The liberation of the body itself is very characteristic of the Afro-diasporic experience in the Americas (Daniel). The constant marginalization of a people is combatted through daily performance practices like those in timba. Timba not only created spaces for the body to perform its own empowerment, but also its subversion of the state. This rejection of the state is evident in the articulation of performance markers of CDA in the social choreographies of Timba. It represented the complexity of being a proud nationalist and critical of the social efficacy of the revolution.

Timba created the setting for conversations surrounding notions of two types of Cubans. One for CDA, which was characterized by poverty and marginalization, the other for *Cubanos Blancos* with access to remittances, and therefor more luxury and wealth. It is clear that CDA celebrated their African roots through timba as it was

responsible for the "revival of culture [CDA] during the Special Period. The great popularity of timba amongst CDA compared to *Cubanos Blancos*, demonstrated a clear ideological divide. CDA wanted to celebrate their own identities, and did so through the musical structure which was incredibly influenced by Afro- Atlantic religious ritualistic music of bata (Henken, 354). These influences were clearly displayed in the choreography of timba.

Timba music impacted Casino Salsa's social performance repertoire in the 1990s. Its complex music structure allowed Casino dancers the opportunity to fluidly shift between genres in choreography. Timba dances were characterized by couples who danced together, but also apart to showcase their individual technical ability. Neely describes this exchange:

> "Couples split and the attention focused on the women as they performed a series of sexually-provocative motions that included exaggerated pelvic movements such as the b*atidora* ("blender"), with quick pelvic rotations, or the *tembleque* "shaking"), where the body trembles as if electrocuted. Some women jumped onstage to perform the *batidora* in front of the band and to a cheering crowd, who loudly sang along the coros. (Neely, 53-54)

These stark transitions between fast, slow, rounded, sharp, isolated, or whole bodied movement showed the dancer's ability to fluidly transition and select certain patterns in the polyrhythmic music to execute. Because timba is rooted to the *cuban clave*, Casino Salsa can be executed with this musical rhythm (Lopez Cano, 29). Dancers could master the rhythms and dance to the various tempos throughout a musical set. I have seen dancers go from dancing 2 eight counts of rumba, 3 eight count of Casino *figuras*, to 1 eight count of improvised *temblequez* within the same song. Cubans of African decent had the ability to master the music and the dance genres within Cuban

history well enough to transition through them seamlessly in social dance settings. Their execution of these ideas created a narrative that linked Blackness with performance virtuosity, and empowered the Black community.

Timba allows CDA the "point of articulation of the Cuban black youth's symbolic resistance to social norms, both through its role as a voice of the pride of the people of African descent and its celebrations of low life and materialism" (Vaughan, 7). Dance *figuras* like *Salchocha Mambo* embody the influence of timba within Casino perfectly. Dancers had to keep three separate times in their heads. It required the dancer to differentiate the rapid counts of the cha cha cha, from the pauses in the timing of son, and the basic timing of the *clave cubana* as a salsa foundation. Within this one *figura,* dancers show a mastery of timing and execution of three different dance genres within the performance of Casino.

Although *Salchocha Mambo* is a clear example of Casino's complex choreography within timba, social dancers who do not have a mastery of the Casino *figuras* would still play with the timing of the timba when dancing in social circles. They go from Casino to rumba to hip hop within the same song without *perdiendose* (losing the rhythm or counts) within the music. The amount of musical and choreographic training necessary for the clear execution of timba, allows for immense freedom and versatility within Casino. People are not limited to the *figuras* but, instead, demonstrate virtuosity on the dance floor through a critical understanding and manipulation of tempos and articulations of the body. Timba's complex musical structure incorporated the rhythms of many Cuban genres, which made the dance accessible to the *pueblo*.

Timba became a cross-generational music style, which allowed the older generations to dance danzon, young adults to dance Casino, and the teenagers to execute both within the same song as long as they mastered the timing. In many ways, timba was responsible for "rescuing the 'casino wheel' dance after a long period of decline, because timba inspired new interest in contemporary Cuban popular music… and enticed people back into the dance floor" (Vaughan, 36). Timba connected people through dance by creating a Cuban sound that easily created enough percussive complexities for *the entire pueblo* to participate in.

Timba was the first aspect of Cuban music to be directly affected by the hip hop popularity amongst young Cubans, particularly those of African descent, directly after the fall of the USSR bloc in Cuba. During this time, the popular *salsa cubana* had been coopted by international commercialization, and timba provided the Cuban people a way to connect to popular Cuban culture in uniquely Cuban way. The musical and lyrical complexities of timba validated the Cuban youth of African descent struggled for equity during the Special Period. *Timba* allowed for the popularity of Casino Salsa to rise due to its ability to seamlessly maintain the Casino structure, with lyrics and sonic cues that resonate with the Cuban people as a whole. Although the 1990s are characterized by the rise of timba, the early 2000s mark a shift in the Cuban youth culture's mentality. They welcomed the idea of opening up to the rest of the globe by demonstrating a key interest in the Puerto Rican phenomenon of reggaetón, which in many ways took the focus away from a solely Cuban musical identity.

Dale Reggaetón: From the Caribbean and into Cuban Streets

Reggaetón surpassed hip hop's popularity amongst the *pueblo* during the latter half of the 1990s and into the 2000s due to its ability to directly speak to topics of racial marginalization and economic disenfranchisement through a familiar language and rhythm. According to Dixon-Roman and Gomez,

> "Reggaetón, initially born out of Puerto Rico, Panama and Jamaica, emerged as a new musical genre in the early 1990s. The fusion of salsa, rumba, reggae and rap was infectious throughout the Americas. Reggaetón is fast rhythm and its use of salsa, reggae, dancehall and rumba incites the body to move and dance…Reggaetón has surpassed hip hop in popular consumption" (368).

Reggaetón, although created in foreign countries, created a shared *Caribeño* (Spanish speaking Caribbean) experience. Its sound paralleled the sounds of the Caribbean that culminated into a musical hybrid that accounted for its many influences. Sonically, Reggaetón is characterized by the "*dem bow*…a minimal drum track with a hint of Latinesque percussion and a unique timbral profile… a ubiquitous feature of underground mixes (Marshall, 38). The hybridized percussive nature of reggaetón led to its major success in the Americas, because it expressed influences from several other styles Reggae, Soca, Bomba, and electronica.

Although Reggaetón did not address aspects of political resistance as aggressively as hip hop did, it provided the basis for racial empowerment within the Afro-Caribeño community. According to Torrez,

> "Reggaetón emerged close to socially, economically, and politically marginalized youth, mainly Black, but in contrast to hip hop …it has reached massive popularity due to its wide circulation within underground networks. Reggaeton is the opposite of committed hip hop. Whereas rap conveys explicit political content, reggaeton—just as timba

> before—'is more about contesting cultural hegemony' through covert and subversive ways in music and dance (Torrez, 252).

Reggaetón actively rejected the confined racial stereotypes imposed on Afro-Latinos, who had previously been silenced from dominant political discourse in the Americas. Reggeaton spoke directly to the youth who identified themselves within "la cultural urbana, que incluye determinado look, vestimenta, tatuajes, religion, lenguaje, y expressiones [the urban culture, that includes a determined look, style, tattoos, religion, language, and expression]" (Martinez Noriega, 63). This semantic view of visual signifiers within reggaetón culture, allude to a Black culture in the Caribbean that deemed CDA unworthy of social status. People were judged by their appearance, and reggaetón embraced the complexities through the music. It was through reggaetón that there was a clear cross -over between Latin genres and hip hop culture. One of the main pioneers of reggaetón was Tego Calderon, considered the "King of reggaetón," who spoke openly about regaining ownership and pride over his Blackness as a Puerto Rican *reggetonero* (Baez, 65). He famously uttered the words "there is ignorance and stupidity in Puerto Rico and Latin America when it comes to blackness" in a New York Post interview (NYP, 2007). His critique within reggaetón placed race at the forefront of the discussion, which complimented the work that CDA had already done with hip hop. Although he took a firm stance on racial issues, reggaetón continued to be plagued with overt sexism in its lyrics (Baez). Reggaetón coupled with Cuban hip hop created a unique Cuban sound of reggaetón, which some have coined *Cubatón*.

Within the Cuban context, reggaetón marked a shift in Cuban understanding of the self in relation to a greater Afro-Caribeño community. Due to its vulgar and

aggressive language, it was banned in Cuba in 2012, an act that marked its counterrevolutionary potential. Much discourse surrounding reggaetón in Cuba revolved around its hypersexual nature. Furthermore, its music reflected and reinforced the tourists' perceptions of CDA as sexual and exotic. Young *habaneros* (youths from Havana) during the 1990s were "reinventing the body as a site of pleasure, personals gain, and social mobility rather than productive, collective labor" (Torrez, 235). The state deemed reggeatón as unrevolutionary because of its vulgarity and overly sexist lyrics in political discourse, but in many ways this was as a scapegoat. I believe the Cuban state was actually worried about the racial divisions made clear within the music as well as the desires for commodities outside of the island and outside the communist revolutionary framework. For example, "references to money jewelry, beverages, cars, cell phones, and other goods are common" although they are vastly "distant from Cuban reality" (Torrez, 238-239). The glorification of materialist gains coupled with the racialized hyper-sexualization of CDA showed the fissures in a seemingly egalitarian system. As described by Torrez, "Reggaetóns's characteristics and success are deeply linked to the emergent values of a Cuban underclass and the rising ideology of consumerism in the country" that was disproportionate to the white counterparts (Torrez, 228). The Cuban youth was increasingly more willing to participate in conversations that disproved the homogeneity that the state promoted. Hip hop provided reggaetón the framework for "transformative pedagogical possibilities, what [they] will later refer to as *pedagogias marginal* [marginal pedagogies]" (Dixon-Roman & Gomez, 365). These modes of gaining knowledge and disseminating it onto the Cuban public restored a pride

in Blackness amongst the youth.

Reggeatón in Cuba is perceived as simply vulgar and hypersexual, but its implications of sexuality were incredibly complex. The reggaetón movements empower the Cuban man in performance, which combats his inferiority in political and social aspects of Cuban life. However, it comes at the expense of the woman or women he is danced with. Although Cuba, arguable "no sufre del machismo de paizes como Mexico [does not suffer from machismo to the extend that countries like Mexico do]," machismo is still very much present in the performance of *perreo* in reggeaton (Edicta, 2015). El *Perreo,* literally translates to "'doggy' style in Puerto Rican/Latin slang," but refers to "the dance of 'grinding' or that which imitates the movements of sexual intercourse" (Fairley, 479 & Baez, 72). The *perreo* accentuated the complexities of Cuban sexuality in social dance forms. It was considered misogynist in it promotion of the "imagen de la mujer como dominada, sumisa y objeto sexual [image of a woman being dominated, submissive, and limited to a sexual object]" (Martinez, Noriega, 65). This image illustrated the male dominance and prowess over his female partner, however this relationship discounts any aspect of female agency within these spaces. On the other hand, reggaetón has been perceived as a way for women to change the narrative from submissive to dominant in social settings. For example, Baker describes reggaetón as a genre in which a "woman did not need a partner and did not need to be 'led'; during live shows, female dancers usually danced alone or in front of their partners, on whom they had their backs turned, which the mans role reduced from leader to follower or even observer" (Baker, 136). I disagree with the first idea because it limits a woman's agency,

and the latter because it does not account for the continued objectification of women.

In my experience dancing reggeatón and seeing it in Havana nightlife, there is a much more complex relationship between both dancers. I think that these authors impose a western notion of sexualization onto the dancers that does not directly transfer over. In my experience, the connotation of the dominance is dependent on the song, on the relationship between people, and the mastery of their own technique. It is not static. On multiple occasions, I have seen *perreo* being danced by a mother and son, cousins, or friends without the sexual innuendoes that many academics make references to. To say that sex is explicitly gendered in a specific way is to say that sex is just as easily quantifiably gendered. I believe that conversations about the *perreo* focus on the dichotomy between men and woman on the dance floor, but not on their performance as a unit, which can be empowering on a social level. I believe that *perreo* has the potential to empower both people, to varying degrees, through the Bakhtinian idea of carnivalesque.

Bakhtin's idea of carnivalesque permeates the performance of reggaetón in Havana night life, because Cuban youth performers seemed to feel momentarily liberated from the marginalization of their daily lives and empowered through dance. This dance became incredibly popular amongst the youth in nightclubs. Bakhtin describes carnivalesque as a time when "All were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age" (Bakhtin, 10). The racial marginalization within the Black community was temporarily

overcome through a shared performance of gender empowerment through a sexual performative exchange of *perreo*. It is through the idea of carnivalesque that *perreo* can be seen as a valuable source of social capital within dance halls that display power based on technique, prowess, and sexuality. This empowerment via sexual liberation is problematic in certain instances, because power was measured by the performance of simulated sex in Cuban night life. During the 1990s, the *jineterismo (*hustler mentality) of many CDA equated sex with money and power. The youth in the 1990s saw sex as power, and they are able to attain it with the sexual expressions seen during *perreo*. Not only has *perreo* been incredibly popular during music sets by Gente de Zona, Pitbull, Los 4, and Los Desiguales, but these movement vocabularies have appeared in Casino *ruedas* and figures in the last twenty years.

This indicates a clear influence of reggaetón into social choreographic histories of Casino. Even though reggaetón is not a "*baile dirigido (*led dance) but one, like house or techno, which allowed the dancer to let go and be free, [it] contrasted foreign and local attitudes, tourists like to go to dance schools, learn fixed steps (like salsa), and then go out dancing to demonstrate their knowledge; but young Cubans are more attracted to the easier, freestyle dances of reggeatón" (Baker, 135). Many young Cubans that I spoke with in Havana talked about the difficulty of memorizing the *figuras*, and the age divide between those who remember the *figuras* well and those who did not. One of the conversations I had with people about this phenomenon was with Dariel, he said that "la juventud menor de los 25 anos casi no aprende las figuras como antes [the youth under the age of 25 year old don't really learn the figuras as vigorously as those in the past]"

(Dariel, 2015). Although this made me a bit worried about the legitimacy of my research because that would mean I was studying an art form that was not longer relevant to the Cuban population, I realized that there is still a vibrant culture surrounding Casino performances that was significantly influenced by the new artistic wave of reggaetón. It simply was not formally included into *figuras* in the conventional way. For example, Cuban youth do not use reggeaton within the Casino *figuras*, but if they hear a song by Charanga Habanera, Isaac Delgado, or Habana D' Primera they will do basic Casino combinations with a partner. Even without the official *figuras* in their choreography dancers perform the basics and *florean (*freestyle turning and gliding across the floor) with their partner. However, when a song by Los 4 is featured at popular dance clubs like El Cangrejo, Casa de La Musica, or El Sauce they would *dance perreo* for a portion of the music and *florear* Casino for the other. The complexities of Cuban reggeaton's musicality and choreography allowed people to switch between both movement vocabularies seamlessly without needing the formality of giving it a name.

In recent years, Casino *figura*s incorporated *figuras* that paralleled that sexual imagery of *perreo*. In *rueda,* a new figura called *yogurt* and *yogurt de perro* includes *perreo* into its choreographic style and the sexualization in its metaphoric name. Fairley recalls learning rueda in Cuba in 2001, and being introduced to these two figuras, which illustrate the power of the Cuban youth voice in Casino choreographies. She describes *yogurt's* choreography as "a quick hit between the couple of pelvic areas, yogurt in question standing in Cuban street language for 'la crema' i.e ejaculated sperm" (Fairley, 482). These quick pelvic thrusts allude to the "vaccination" of the hen present in Afro-

diasporic dance genre called Guaguanco[45]. Its choreographic imagery alludes directly to the ejaculation of sperm and male virility in performance. The closeness between partners that *yogurt* requires reflects the same movement qualities as *perreo*. More explicitly, however, *yogurt de perro* (Dog-yogurt) is "done back to front double time with rapid undulations in the pelvis. Balbuena offers no explanation as to why new moves might have emerged," in Casino, but it seems that the popularity of youth culture in reggaetón directly impacted the popular cultural tastes in Cuba.

Reggaetón has had an incredible impact on the way that Cuban youths of African descent have come to understand their own racial oppression and sexual liberation. The inclusion of *perreo* has created complex conversations about agency in the sexualized performances that have permeated the contemporary *figuras* of Casino.

Cubatón: Sound and Experience of a *Nuevo Cubano*

Cubatón (reggaetón *a lo Cubano*, reggaetón the Cuban way) is the culmination of timba and reggaetón, and it is a relatively new term in Cuban communities. Cubatón connected the sounds and performances of Cuban timba and Puerto Rican reggaetón genre directly to the Cuban people. It brings together the sounds and dance repertoires of its hip hop influenced antecedents. Cubatón, showcases the changes in consciousness in CDA over time since the triumph of the revolution. It shows the changes in consciousness in Cuba, as it illustrates the shift from Cuban national pride through music to the active participation in the global arena through transcultural genres. During the

[45] Guaguanco is a dance and music genre that arose from the African diasporic experience. It is a dance in which "coupled performed a pantomime of sexual seduction closely resembling the *yuka* fertility dance found in parts of central Africa" (Stewart, 21).

2000s, the rise of Cubatón marked the shift from the rhetoric of pride in "the New Man," as described in Che Guevara's famous 1965 essay called "El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba [socialism and the Cuban man]" to the "New Cuban Man" that is put on full display when Cuban youths of African descent desire to have access to the global community through the arts. I argue that the construction of a *Nuevo Cubano* identity emerges from a modern Black Atlantic double consciousness, which is informed by a critical understanding of Blackness and Latinidad as displayed in Cubatón's sonic, lyrical, and choreographic influences from abroad.

In Che Guevara's famous essay in 1965 he characterized the ideal New Man as a revolutionary who enacts the goals of the state in his daily lives. Most notably he states:

> The people, the still sleeping mass that had to be mobilized; and its vanguard, the guerrillas, the motor force of the mobilization, the generator of revolutionary consciousness and militant enthusiasm. This vanguard was the catalysing agent that created the subjective conditions necessary for victory.… The vanguard group is ideologically more advanced than the mass; the latter understands the new values, but not sufficiently. While among the former there has been a qualitative change that enables them to make sacrifices in their capacity as an advance guard, the latter see only part of the picture and must be subject to incentives and pressures of a certain intensity. This is the dictatorship of the proletariat operating not only on the defeated class but also on individuals of the victorious class. (Guevara, 273, 252).

He describes the New Man as masculine and having an un questioned faith in the new system to fit its best interests. This takes agency away from the Cuban people and makes them cogs in a machine that sought to continue the goals of the revolution. During the time of this essay's release, Guevara wanted to encourage Cubans to gain a unique sense of Cuban identity rooted in the state. These sentiments arose from a

> "dissatisfaction … with Russia's influence on Cuba. It was beginning to look very much as though the island had only moved from economic dependency on the US to economic dependency on the USSR. The missile crisis of 1962, when Khrushchev opened military bases in Cuba and then arranged with Kennedy to shut them down without asking the Cubans, showed that the political relationship was much the same"(Conroy, 1).

Guevara wanted to create a country that was not dependent on any imperialist power above them making key decisions for a people they were not connected to. This essay brought Cubans much pride and empowerment during the time of its release. However, after the drastic shift in political rule of the 1990s, Cubans were no longer as unconditionally tied to the state on all matters. The Cuban youth did not fully understand the direct effects of the revolution when attempting to make sense of their abject status within a seemingly egalitarian communist country. They found their experiences as marginalized people better articulated in music genres found outside the island.

CDA found a new understanding of the self from the socio-economic shifts of the 1990s. I want to be clear, I acknowledge that racial discrimination has always been a part of the Cuban social narrative, though it took on different forms throughout its history. However the pride in performing a countercultural identity through popularized music outlets, which validated the experiences of the marginal communities was incredibly characteristic of this time period. In the 1990s, CDA used international music influences to affirm various parts of their complex identities.

I expand on the idea of a transnational embodied citizenship, which focuses on " 'culture' and its relationship to history, to violence, and to notions and practices of citizenship" also on "its relationship to representation, debates about the appropriateness

and availability of representations, notions of who has the power to create representations, and the relationships between representation and economic development" (Thomas, 4). Although Thomas focuses almost exclusively on the practice of violence as it pertains to Jamaican media, punishment, and popular culture, her ideas of transcultural influences within the state are incredibly similar to the current aspects that motivate the Cuban youth culture to create and promote subversive artistic outlets. According to Thomas, the representation of embodied citizenship in transnational Jamaica

> has been a frame through which Jamaicans have defined their relationships both to a wider world and to the nation- state since the late nineteenth century…On one hand…working- class and poorer Jamaicans are experiencing greater autonomy, and their cultural forms of expression have become more prominent within a general public sphere. On the other hand, as neoliberalism erodes the promises of sovereignty on various levels and as Jamaicans living within North America and the United Kingdom come to experience 'global citizenship' as ever more profoundly racialized, new sorts of anxieties have emerged about the future (127-128).

Being that Cuba and Jamaica have differing histories, each country's relationship to the United States and European countries is vastly different. However, one main themes that is true for both countries is the need for agency and power towards disenfranchised groups. Casino's changing repertoire showcases its adaptability to reflect the sentiments of the populations who practice it. Since the 1990s, Casino has promoted counterculture that performed the perspectives and complex identities of the Black community. They have included genres like hip hop, reggaetón and timba as a way to gain the tools to articulate their marginal status, validate their experiences, and legitimate a transcultural

community based shared experiences of racial and class marginalization. It is through the connections Cubans have made within the African diasporic community, that they have been able to gain agency within the Cuban state.

One of the most significant points of difference between Jamaica and Cuba, is that the anxiety created by 'global citizenship.' In Cuba this fear of global citizenship seems to come from the state and not the people who use it as a source of empowerment. The state fears the potential rise of imperial rule over Cuba through these interactions, and also the deviation from a pride in a Cuban nationalist identity. However, the Cuban youth seem excited and eager to partake in the 'global citizenship' within the artistic realm. I believe their excitement to enter the global arena comes from not knowing the lived effects of capitalism abroad. They, unlike the Jamaicans, have not lived through the moments in history in which the United States has damaged the economic systems abroad. They are enticed by an alluring fictive reality. I believe that Thomas' theory sets a framework for my work that aims to explain the agency of young Cuban artists who have creatively and strategically incorporated at least three different musical genres within the Cuban social dance frame. Embodied citizenship in transnational Cuba can explain the African American, Latino Caribeño, and Cuban influences in a dance that the state promoted as a new tool of equity.

Latinidad suggests homogeneity within the Latino community that can be problematic due to its ephemerality. One of the first scholars to write about Latinidad, Rodriguez, understands that "Latinidad serves to define a particular geopolitical experience but it also contains within it the complexities and contradictions of

immigration, (post)(neo)colonialism, race, color, legal status, class, nation, language, and the politics of location" (Rodriguez, 9). It creates a collective memory of Latinness in the minds of those who identify within that community. Although Latinidad seems to encapsulate the sentiments of many American Latino communities, it is plagued with a few limitations that do not exclusively apply to the Cuban community. According to Padilla, Latinidad is a term fraught with a *situational ethnic identity* created to combat specific social pressures of "ethnic tensions, police brutality, and the rise of a racist doctrine" (Padilla, 44). This is definitely clear within the American context, but it is not completely the focal point of Cuban youth cultural music. Cubans connect to a Latino identity through sonic, lyrical, and embodied similarities in popular music. They embrace artistic similarities across Latin America and the Spanish Speaking Caribbean to enter the global arena.

Although Latinidad accounts for a Latino identity as a whole, it is an incredibly limited racialized term that does not account for the Afro-Latino experiences within it. In many ways Laitnidad does not address intersectionalities that are incredibly vital to understanding its problematic notions as well as its positive ones. As some writers have suggested, latinidad is primarily understood "in terms of a more specific ethnicity of national origin, at times … a collective identity imagined in those more specific terms; such texts nevertheless inevitably question and poke at group boundaries and preset various cross-racial, cross-class, and transnational notions of collective identity" (Caminero-Santangelo, 33). In many ways, the current construction of Latinidad as a Pan-ethnic Latino entity reinforced stereotyped notions of Latinidad. For example, the

varying degrees to which colorism, racism, sexism, nationalism affects varying Latino groups is not accounted for. I believe that latinidad lacked the conversations surrounding race that were explicitly present in the Black Atlantic experience.

In the case of Cuba, the Cuban youth of African descent used music as a way to embodied citizenship in a transnational Cuba. They were initially given the tools for active political music making through hip hop, which directly addressed issues of racial discrimination, disproportionate poverty levels, and disproportionate criminal rates to their white counterparts. They were given access to political Spanish music through reggeatón that they implemented in timba and later into Cubatón. They continued to move away from a sole Cuban nationalist identity in the 1990s, and moved into an era that welcomed the participation of Cuban artists in the global arena. This has shifted the popular narrative of the New Socialist Man to the New Cuban Man of the 21st century in Cuba.

During an interview with Elias, who is the curator for Salvador Gonzalez Escalona's art in Callejon the Hamel, he spoke candidly about the overwhelming and popular desire that young Cubans have to "salir de Cuba, tener experencias diferentes, aprender de otras culturas, y usar la Mirada de los turistas para salir adelante [leave Cuba, have different experiences, learn about other cultures, and use tourists to push forward and be successful]" (Elias, 2015). Elias touched on two key topics that have changed the politics within Black communities: global accessibility and a hustling mentality. They want to be exposed to the various cultures that lie outside the island's walls, and need to make money to rectify their lack of access to the CUC economy

through Cuba's drastic economic changes. These themes of branching out of Cuba, are incredibly revolutionary because they rely closer to racial and cultural similarities and not rooted in a Cuban national image. I believe that the reason why more transcultural hybridic music is so worrisome for the Cuban state is not because of its vulgarity, but because of its potential to create the catalyst for the change that the marginalized so desperately seek from their government.

The Power of the Youth Speaks

Casino Salsa permeates through facets of Cuban *musica bailable*, social dance, after the 1990s because it is what connected the Revolution's New Cuban Man to the contemporary Cuban identity during a time that was incredibly influenced by the global musical market. It absorbed hip hop, timba, and reggaetón choreographies into Casino Salsa as a way to preserve new ideas within a dance that gave them a space to assert their agency over. The music after 1990s shows an embodied transnational citizenship. CDA are now entering into artistic discourses surrounding their complex identities as both Latino and Black through their music. They use the arts as a way to navigate and make sense of their lived experiences and become incredibly critical of the Cuban state with regards to racial politics. The Casino embodied repertoire of the 1990s illustrated creation of a New Cuban Man, who was to perform the reality of Cuban life and the desires of connecting to the global arena within choreography. Casino during the 1990s, created a space for the marginalized to freely perform their reality. They were able to voice their political critiques within the lyrics of popular music genres and embodied performance in Cuban nightlife. They included the aspects of their connection to a Black

diaporic experience with hip hop, a Latino identity with reggaetón, and a Cuban nationalist identity with timba. These genres showcased the desire for Cuban youth to be complex participants within the global musical arena.

CDA have incorporated transnational music and dance genres within Casino as a way to understand their place in the global arena. In the case of global histories, Cuba is perceived as "un paiz en hielo [a country in ice]," static and stuck in a problematic past. However, the changes within Casino speak loudly about the various influences that the Cuban *pueblo* has used to advance and continue the original goals of equity during the revolution in their own way. The Cuban youth of African descent have used global music and Cuban dance to articulate their racial, national, and ethnic complexities to the world. They are elevating a critical consciousness about their place in the modern global world through their artistry, and it seems to be catching fire on the island. The heat they emit in their new subaltern lyrics, hybrid musicality, and provocative dancing, shows just how the youth are reflecting the *candela,* fire, in society within their embodied performance.

CONCLUSION

My master's thesis investigation privileged me with the opportunity to return to Cuba in 2015 to conduct ethnographic research. I continued to take dance classes with Profesora Edicta Sherwood and Maestro Robin Rodriguez Sherwood in *Folklor* and *Bailes Populares*. These classes helped me better understand the choreographic patterns I attempted to analyze in night clubs, but more importantly it helped me begin to implement these styles in my own dancing.

During my last week in Cuba, my host family from 2013, Ana Luisa and Yaimara, hosted a farewell party for me and Yainelis[46]. They invited a few of the community members in Pogolotu that I knew as well as friends of theirs that I had never met before. As we began to dance and *gozar* (celebrate), I found myself incorporating rumba, perreo, and popping in my solo performance of Casino. I did not even realize I was doing this until Yisell showed me a video from that evening. I believe that I had heard similar songs at the party that I had danced to in my classes that I connected the movement more fluidly within my body. One woman who heard me speak, said "esta es Yuma? [this is a Yuma]" and proceeded to say "baila como Cubana [dances like a Cuban girl]." My body within that spaces had made me escape from my position as Yuma to Cuban, because of the connection between identity and the movement of the body. I did not know how to respond, but I continued to dance. To my surprise, a neighbor asked me to dance a song by Havana D' Primera. The moment I dreaded had arrived, I would embarrass myself in front of my friends. My fear of once again *perdiendome* (getting

[46] Ana Luisa's daughter and Yaimara's older sister who currently resides in Canada.

lost in the music) consumed me. I took a deep breath, held his hand, and proceeded to dance. My nerves has gone away, and I danced the entire night. I was just excited to not have been *botada* (dumped) once more, but more thrilled that I could actually keep up.

Casino Salsa is a transformative and diverse dance genre that embodies the narratives, histories, and representations of CDA since the 1950s. Through the vast choreographic changes that occurred in the Casino repertoire within pre-revolutionary, revolutionary, and contemporary Cuba, Casino performers of African descent have demonstrated a complex understanding of their identities within the Cuban state. Casino Salsa has been able to facilitate the counterculture of the Black community within a seemingly homogenous Cuban national identity. Not only has Casino provided CDA a way to embody their critical consciousness within Cuban social spaces, but it has also validates the concerns and marginal identities of the Black community through the preservation of their influences within the genre. People understand that "tenemos que respetar nuestra historia y la danza. Todo con respeto. Nosotros bailamos Casino con los bailes que nos gustan pero tambien los bailes que ya existian. Es una manera de mantener sus voces [we have to respect our history and the dance. Everything with respect. We dance Casino with the influences of dances we like, but also include the dances that already existed. This is out way of keeping their voices alive]" (Aime, 2015).

CDA have been able to go from non-actors in the genre, to active agents in the transformation and dissemination of knowledge within the lyrics and choreography. Casino provides an alternative look into Cuban history through the frame of CDA. The performance of Casino has reflected the road from omission to representation within

Cuban history. The Black community enacted its own agency by performing the complex self within the choreography of Casino that has become one of the island's most profitable artistic commodity.

The preservation of the dance genre is due to its adaptability. It has been able to trace the changing perspectives and goals of the Cuban *pueblo*. In the 1950s it reflected the lack of access into elite social spheres based on racial discrimination. CDA were made invisible in the projection of a Cuban image in the tourist markets. After the triumph of the revolution, the covert performances of Yoruba choreographies within Casino showcased a need to create an alternative reality through embodied practice. CDA saw Casino as a safe space to perform an identity that the state deemed as threatening to the goals of the revolution. During the economic depression of the 1990s, Cuban youths of African descent became the primary gatekeepers for the trajectory of the genre. They overtly addressed the racial and class marginalization of the Black community with the incorporation of global sounds like hip hop and reggaetón to describe their status as second-class citizens in contemporary Cuba. Casino has continued to gain popularity because of its ability to absorb the repertoires that are important to marginalized groups. Each choreographic moment indicates a specific time period that evokes a historical reference. Although these choreographic symbols are not static, and constantly shift, they reflect the identity of the complex individuals who perform it.

Casino's utility comes from its ability to provide alternative spaces that counter the dominant social discourses that isolate the disenfranchised. People use Casino spaces

to create community amongst those who think and identify in similar ways without needing to say a word. The dancing body holds meaning and knowledge that can be understood within Cuban nightlife. Casino privileges the body as a site of power and countercultural community making in social performance. It also writes CDA back into a valuable history that is created for and by the people.

During my trips to Cuba, people would often say that Casino would persist as long as there was a Cuban *pueblo* to represent. This was their way of pointing to the stupidity of my question, as well as answering it in the most honest way. They believe that Casino provides safe spaces to perform the self, but more importantly to write themselves back into a history that has yet to address their contributions as a Black community within the Cuban state. Speaking openly the contributions made by the Black community within the national genre of Casino, would add social value to a group that is still directly affected by its marginalization.

Casino is active. It empowers the marginal, it represents the silenced, and it counters the dominant narrative through embodied practice. It has become increasingly more subversive to the Cuban state. In more recent years, it has propelled the advancement of the Black community through its ability to act as a counter frame to the Cuban national discourse. In my work I speak explicitly about a monolithic Black community. I did not have the opportunity to delve into aspects of intersectionalities of identities within the performance of Casino in the ways that I would have liked to. I wish I could have included more information on the gendered, class, and touristic relationships that occurred during these three time periods.

Casino's power to ignite a politically active and socially critical sentiment within the Cuban *pueblo* showcases it as a site of empowerment. People are quite protective over this dance form in Cuba, as it has been active in "ensenandole al mundo quien yo soy, que siento, y que yo quiero de mi Cuba [teaching the world who I am, what I feel, and what I want from my Cuba]" (Reynier, 2013). This dance is not static or just a dance. It is an extention of a countercultural frame that people are holding tight to. As adequately stated by Judith Hamera, "these chapters…argue against the notion that performance, and dance in particular, happens only to disappear. Performances persist in minds and hearts, in places and in talk…"(16). Casino does just this. It is the unapologetic representation of the political self on full display, and against the Cuban state that tried to limit the *pueblo's* voices in public settings. It reclaims a voice that was intended to be silenced generations ago.

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GLOSSARY

Abakua: A religious fraternity culturally and ideologically linked to the regions of Southeastern Nigeria and Southwestern Cameroon.

Baile dirigido: led or partnered dance

Bailes Espectaculos: Spectacle dance performances consisting of aerialist arts, circus performance, popularize performances, and touring dance companies.

Bailes Populares: Popular dances genres like but not limited to, cha cha cha, mambo, casino, danzon, and son.

Batá drums: Three double headed drums shaped like hourglasses that are regarded as sacred within Yoruba religious practices. It is considered an orisha of its own in many cases, and the sound it emotes allows humans to directly connect and summon the divine dieties.

Botada: Being "dumped" on the dance floor. This colloquial term is used to refer to the action of leaving someone at the perimeter of the dance floor for not being able to match the lead dancer's movement.

Candela: Slang word that describes something that sounds *hot* or *on fire*

Casiner@[47]: a Casino Salsa dancer (male and female)

Chango: Religión Yoruba and Santeria deity of fire and thunder. He is a masculine orisha associated with virility, power, strength, and domination of dance. In Santeria he is syncretized with Saint Barbara.

Contratiempo: Dancing against the musical setback.

Cubano Blanco: Cuban who is phenotypically white or lighter skinned. The social implications of this racial classification allude to a privileged position in the social hierarchy.

Cubano Negro: Cuban who is racialized as black due to skin tone. The social implications of being black in Cuba are still plagued with connotations of inferiority and lower class due to centuries of marginalization in pre-revolutionary Cuba.

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[47] I use @ as an inclusive gender term accounts for women and men. In Spanish, words are categorized as masculine or feminine. By including @ within a word, I am including both its masculine and feminine form within the same word.

Cubanos de Descendencia Africana (CDA): A term I use to describe people who identify as African through heritage, race, and/or consciousness. People who acknowledge Africa as a source of empowerment and the site of their roots to varied degrees.

Figura: A choreographic combination used to create the exchange between dancers in *rueda*.

Fina: To be refined, classy, beautiful and/or delicate

Finca: An estate in Cuba with animals (typically used for religious blood sacrifices) and vegetation.

Florear: To dance across the dance floor without designated or defined *figuras,* and instead improvise during a led dance. It can also refer to the movement between defined *figuras* that are flirty and playful.

Folklor: Dance genre that focuses on the folklorized movement of Yoruba orisha.

Gozadera: Having a good time, partying, or celebrating.

Habaneros: People from Habana.

Jabao: A term used to describe people with light skin and course or kinky hair.

Jineter@s: A word for a Cuban hustler, usually associated with the sex-work.

La calle: Literally means "the street." Refers to people and cultures from low-income communities, usually promoted by youth culture.

Mulat@: A term used to describe someone who is bi-racial, usually Black and white.

Ochosi: Religión Yoruba and Santeria deity of hunting. He is a masculine deity that hunts with a bow and arrow, and hits every target he aims for. In Santeria, he is syncretized with Saint Sebastian.

Ochun: Religión Yoruba and Santeria deity of love, community, sweetness, and honey. She is a female deity who performs with a playful, sensual, and flirty demeanor. She is the deity who watches over rivers. In Santeria, she is syncretized with Our lady of Charity.

Oggun: Religión Yoruba and Santeria deity of technology, iron, and strength. He is a masculine warrior deity who performs movements based on hunting with a machete. In Santeria he is syncretized with Saint Peter.

Orisha: Yoruba influenced religions' deities.

Palo: A Congo based Afro-Atalantic based religion.

Paquete: A digital archive of international and national popular music, music videos, movies, sound bites, magazines, newspaper articles, and shows that people can download upon purchase. It gets updated every week.

Pareja: A couple.

Solo: An individual.

Perdiendose: Getting "lost" in the movement, or being unable to successfully follow the lead during a partnered dance.

Perreo: Literally means "doggystyle," and refers to grinding on the dance floor.

Pogoloti: Commonly known as "Barrio Pogoloti." It was founded in 1911, as a predominantly Black community. It has remained demographically Black since then, and has a thriving Afro-Atlantic religious community.

Religión Yoruba: A religion in Cuba that is still syncretized with the Catholic church due to the Spanish colonial influence, but more so focused on the maintenance and exaltation of Yoruba practices, ideologies, and traditions within the religion.

Rueda: Literally means "wheel." It refers to a form of Casino Salsa in which couples dance in a circle, and exchange partners through the use of *figuras*. These changes make it seem like the circle is moving like a wheel, in perfect syncopation, from an aerial view.

Santeria: The syncretism of Catholic and Religion Yoruba beliefs.

Temblequez: Literally means "trembling," and refers to the rapid and articulate movement of the pelvis, the shoulders, or the entire body.

Trigueño: Literally means wheat-colored. Refers to a person with olive skin and dark wavy hair, in many cases.

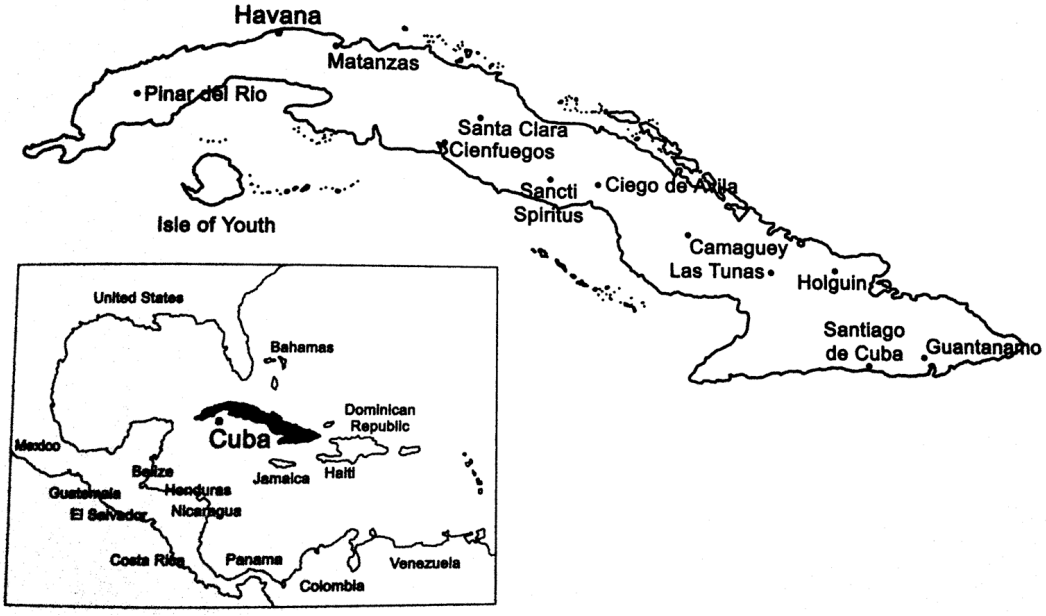
Yemaya: Religión Yoruba and Santeria deity of the ocean, fertility. Although she is considered the mother of all orisha, this orisha can be masculine and others feminine depending on the avatar. She is a powerful dancer with rapid, dynamic, and circular movement that reflects the waves of the ocean. In Santeria, she is syncretized with Our Lady of Regla or the Black Madonna.

Yuma: A term used to describe foreigners, developed countries, and/or bourgeois behavior in Cuban society.

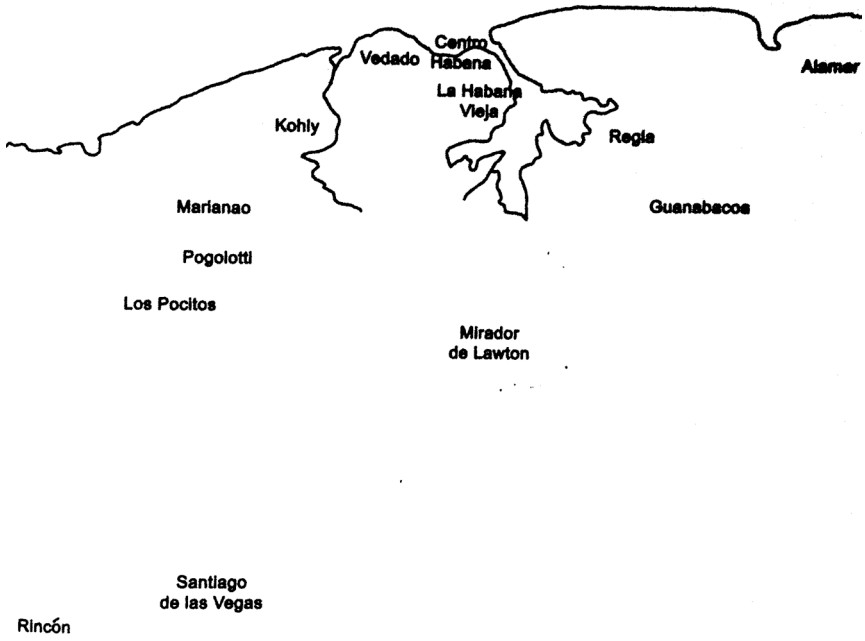
Zona Caliente: Literally means "hot zone," and used to refer to neighborhoods that are considered dangerous. In many cases, there are areas populated by a majority of *Cubanos Negros*.

APPENDIX I

Map of Cuba (Ayorinde)



Map of Havana



APPENDIX II

Categories of Racial Blackness in Cuba

According to Henry Louis Gates and Jesus Guanche Perez's 1996 essay "Etnicidad y racialidad en la Cuba actual," the list below detailed the "order from black to white" in social Cuban relationships (Gates, 231).

Negro Azul
Negro color telefono
Negro con timba
Negro con cabeza de puntilla
Negro
Moro
Mulato
Indio
Mulato chino
Mulato color cartucho
Mulato blanconazo
Trigueño
Jabao
Colorado
Chino
Blanco
Rubio
Blanco orillero
Blanco lechoso
Albino

Within the same source, Tomas Fernandez Robaina also added the following additions to the list:

Negro
Negro achinado
Negro moro
Negro azul
Moreno
Mulato
Mulato indio
Mestizo
Jabao
Blanco capirro
Moro
Afrocubano
Trigueño

APPENDIX III

Casino Salsa Choreographic Forms

Rueda: Literally means "wheel." Comprised of couples that execute *figuras*, choreographic combinations, in circular motion. They exchange partners in a synchronized manner to ensure that the "wheel" continues to move smoothly (Balbuena, 52)

Figure 13: Contemporary Performance of Rueda de Casino in Havana. Picture is a still from the Van Van "Me Mantengo" video, released in 2010.

Pareja: Literally means couples or partners. Dancers most often perform Casino Salsa in this manner at nightclubs. It encompasses *figuras,* between two people on the dance floor.

Figure 14: Couple Dancing at Casa de la Musica en La Habana. Photo provided by author.

Solo: Dancers can perform this genre in freeform as individuals or groups on the perimeters of the dance floor. In many cases, since dancers are not limited by the closed arm positions of partnered social dance, they can incorporate a plethora of dance influences into the improvised choreography they create.

Figure 15: Solo Improvised Dancing at a House Party in Pogoloti with my Host Family. Photo from author.